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The real sublime in Wordsworth's poetry

David K. Rasnake
University of Tennessee

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by David K. Rasnake entitled "The real sublime in Wordsworth's poetry." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Botany.

Allen Dunn, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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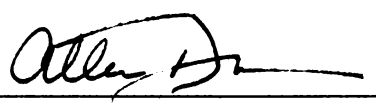

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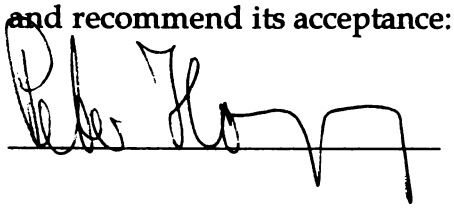
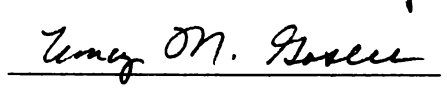
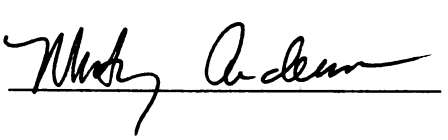
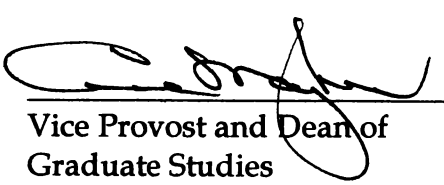






Acceptance for the Council:



Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

The Real Sublime in Wordsworth's Poetry

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

David K. Rasnake
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Braidy Evans Rasnake, without whom my graduate work—among too many other things to mention—would not have been possible.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank those who have contributed to the completion of this project. First and foremost my gratitude must go to my committee. Dr. Nancy Goslee I thank for her wide knowledge of Wordsworth's poetry and English Romanticism generally; a number of times she pointed out things that should have been—but somehow were not—obvious to me, thus saving me from blunders. Dr. Misty Anderson I thank for her knowledge of Jacques Lacan's theoretical work, and for challenging me to be as consistent as possible with it; to whatever extent this text has become more rigorous in its use of Lacanian terminology, much of the credit is hers. Dr. Peter Höyng I thank for making me aware of various connections to the German literature of Wordsworth's time, and thus allowing me to recontextualize my work within the larger framework of European Romanticism.

A special thank you must go to the director of my committee, Dr. Allen Dunn. The origin of this project goes back several years to a seminar he taught on the sublime. From my earliest drafts he has worked conscientiously—often, it must have seemed, against my will—to make this text as strong as possible. From minute details to the larger picture, his guidance has been invaluable every step of the way.

I would also like to thank my other professors and my classmates, both at the University of Tennessee and at Eckerd College, who have—in ways more subtle but no less real—helped me get to this point. From my days at Eckerd College I would like to mention Dr. Bruce Foltz, whose philosophy classes gave me a head start on the critical theory needed to survive graduate school; and Dr. Jewel Spears Brooker, who provided me a solid foundation in nineteenth and twentieth century English literature, as well as a fine example of what it means to be a scholar.

I would like finally to thank Kimberly Raclaw for her encouragement and support, and in the hope that so acknowledging her will inspire her to actually read this text from beginning to end.

Abstract

It is a commonplace of the study of Romanticism that Wordsworth is the Romantic poet of the sublime *par excellence*. But the criticism has never adequately accounted for the radical ways in which the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" (Keats) differs from the notions of transcendence to which Wordsworth was intellectual heir. In the two most prominent eighteenth century theorists of the natural sublime—Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke—the sublime moment is accompanied by a sense of oppression in the face of the natural object. Those looking for such a menace in Wordsworth's poetry of the egotistical sublime will be hard pressed to find one. In a typical passage such as the Simplon Pass episode from Book VI of *The Prelude*, it is rather the subject that seems to threaten the natural world, as the Alps fade away before a mind's contemplation of its own destiny.

This study will serve to explain some of the reasons Wordsworth's version of the sublime diverges so radically from his received models. This will be accomplished via a Lacanian reading of certain key texts in the Wordsworth canon, organized around an interpretation of an early work, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, which features a traumatic encounter which is in many respects evocative of the oppressive natural sublime of Kant and Burke. The intensity of this sublime encounter compels the poet in the years following the composition of this work to develop his own unique version of the sublime. In the Wordsworthian sublime the oppressive elements to be found in a typical eighteenth century "sublime" experience disappear, replaced by a powerful but nonthreatening encounter with the imagination. The Simplon Pass episode is one of the most eloquent and moving examples of this version of the sublime. A key innovation of my reading will be the identification of the "sublime" in Wordsworth as a transformation of an earlier and more primal sublime moment. With this perspective I hope to differentiate my own interpretation from the conventional reading of the sublime in Wordsworth.

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Introduction

Scene 1, 1790: Two friends, college students, are spending their summer vacation on a pedestrian tour of the Continent. On the afternoon they are to ascend to the famed Alpine pass at Simplon, they linger over their lunch and are separated from their guides. After finishing the meal, they become anxious when they fail to overtake their companions. By good fortune they meet a Swiss peasant, who informs them that they have in fact taken a wrong turn, and must retrace their steps to find the proper path. Further, they are told that the remainder of their journey will be downward, that they have already passed the apex to which they aspired, without even noticing it.

Scene 2, 1804: One of the aforementioned travelers is working on a long autobiographical poem. He has just recounted the substance of the previous scene. Reflecting on the dejection he had felt upon hearing the peasant's words, he is suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of the power of his own imagination. Even while considering the depression he had felt in 1790, he is able to recognize the glory of his soul. His previous failure to note that he had gone as high as he could go is put in perspective by the realization that no encounter with a finite nature is a substitute for the infinity that he now feels to be within himself.

The poet of Scene 2 is of course William Wordsworth; the main sources we have for both scenes are the various texts of Book VI of *The Prelude*.[1]

[1] This study explores the evolution of the sublime in Wordsworth's poetry between 1793 and 1805, and finds the culmination of this

The Simplon Pass episode is often taken as an icon of the sublime in Wordsworth, and indeed of the Romantic sublime in general. At a first glance, this poetry is consonant with the natural sublime as articulated by such eighteenth century theorists as Kant and Burke. The parallel with Kant's version of the sublime is perhaps the most striking. As in the *Critique of Judgment*, an overwhelming experience in nature leads to a feeling of dejection—"a momentary inhibition of the vital forces" (98), in Kant's phrase—which is followed by a triumphant recovery in which the subject becomes aware of a supersensible realm beyond nature.

A closer examination of the scene, however, reveals important differences from Wordsworth's received notions of the natural sublime. In Kant, the subject is overwhelmed by the immensity or dynamic power of nature: Kant's sublime is the sublime of towering cliffs and raging storms at sea. In the Burkeian model, similarly, the sublime is associated with any object capable of inspiring terror. The human being at the heart of the sublime experience must feel physically threatened (or, more strictly speaking, potentially threatened; actual terror does not play a part in the sublime, according to both Kant and Burke). It is this sense of oppression in the face of nature which triggers sublime transcendence. Obviously, this is not what happens to Wordsworth in the Simplon Pass episode: no vivid encounter with the natural world leads to his intuition of the supersensible. Curiously enough, it seems that the opposite is the case. Wordsworth's poetry does not make it clear what he expected to find at the apex of his journey, but a single view encompassing mile upon mile of rugged Alpine terrain would provide a reasonable facsimile of the Kantian mathematical sublime. Seemingly it is the *absence* of such an experience that occasions Wordsworth's version of transcendence. Is the Wordsworthian sublime grounded in a failure of its antecedents?

Another intriguing divergence from earlier sublimes presents itself at Simplon. In Kant and Burke, the sublime experience as a whole, dejection and recovery, happens almost instantaneously; to follow the

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trajectory to be the composition of the 1805 *Prelude*. Later revisions of Wordsworth's autobiography are largely incidental to my argument; unless otherwise noted, all references to the "full-length" *Prelude* are from the 1805 version.

division I applied to Wordsworth's Alpine experience, Scenes 1 and 2 are crowded into a single moment. The natural sublime in its most common formulation represents a threat that must be met in the present. In Wordsworth, the dejection occurs in 1790 in the Alps, and the sublime recovery happens a full fourteen years later during the composition of *The Prelude*. As with so much of the poetry written during Wordsworth's so-called Great Decade (roughly, 1797 to 1807), an intense emotional experience is enabled by memory, "the one great myth of his antimythological poetry" (*Poetry and Repression* 52), in Harold Bloom's phrase. Is Wordsworth's poetry too retrospective to admit of a traditional version of the natural sublime? If the Simplon Pass episode is any indication, Wordsworth's sublime is neither Kant's nor Burke's. But to say merely this is of course not to break any new ground.

My hope for this study is that it will serve to explain some of the reasons Wordsworth's version of the sublime diverges so radically from his received models of this aesthetic category. This will be accomplished via a psychoanalytic reading of certain key texts in the Wordsworth canon, organized around an interpretation of an early work, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, which features a traumatic encounter which is in many respects evocative of the oppressive natural sublime of Kant and Burke. The intensity of this sublime encounter—experienced by a fictional character clearly based on Wordsworth himself—compelled the poet in the years following the composition of this work to develop his own unique and less menacing version of the sublime. In the Wordsworthian sublime the oppressive elements to be found in a typical eighteenth century "sublime" experience (and seen also in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*) disappear, to be replaced by a powerful but certainly not threatening encounter with the imagination. The Simplon Pass episode is one of the most important examples of this version of the sublime. Perhaps the key innovation of my reading will be the identification of the "sublime" in Wordsworth as a transformation of an earlier and more primal sublime moment. With this perspective I hope to differentiate my own interpretation from the conventional reading of the Wordsworthian sublime.

The nature of the sublime in Wordsworth is explored at length in Thomas Weiskel's remarkable *The Romantic Sublime*, which remains one of the most interesting and important discussions Wordsworth's

version of transcendence has received. Weiskel shares my interest in the ways Wordsworth's sublime differs from those to which he was intellectual heir. Weiskel explicitly divides the romantic sublime into the Kantian or negative and the Wordsworthian or positive. In *The Romantic Sublime*'s essentially semiotic formulation, the sublime is fueled by a temporary disequilibrium between the perceiving subject and the external world. In Kant, the self is threatened with being overwhelmed by the external; in Wordsworth, external reality signifies too little rather than too much, and the self expands to fill in the gap: "The vacancy, the absolute insufficiency of the *now*, is objectified as the distance between identities which can be signified. A known version or crystallization of the self—an ideal image of the ego—answers and as it were fills up the absence created by pure subjectivity" (Weiskel 143). In Weiskel's reading, it is worth noting, such a process is inextricably bound up with memory.

Weiskel's definition of the Wordsworthian sublime as the semiotic opposite of the Kantian is ingenious, but does this adequately explain the relationship between these two notions of transcendence? Is the inverse of the traditional natural sublime simply another type of sublimity, or is it rather a kind of antisublime? Weiskel's division of the sublime into positive and negative is well-argued, to be sure, but this does not explain the significance of the lack of more oppressive Kantian or Burkeian elements in the Wordsworthian sublime. In the sublime with which Wordsworth was familiar, the subject is threatened with being overwhelmed, and the experience is at least momentarily traumatic; the subject is *shocked* into a sublime response, as it were. In the Wordsworth of the Great Decade, the natural world holds no such terrors. If the experience at Simplon is any indication, the Wordsworthian sublime is grounded in a vague sense of disappointment that the world has not lived up to our expectations. An everyday sort of ennui leads to transcendence. As Weiskel himself puts it: "Apocalypse becomes immanent; the sublime, a daily habit" (50).

This study grew out of a dissatisfaction with traditional readings of the Wordsworthian sublime, which find their most eloquent and full expression in Weiskel. I believe that a complete understanding of the sublime in Wordsworth can only be gained through an examination of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. This work, part of a group of poems commonly dismissed as immature apprenticeship works or "Gothic"

indiscretions, in fact lays the groundwork for what Keats called the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" (157) as it was to evolve over the course of the Great Decade, culminating in certain passages of *The Prelude*, among the most crucial of which is the story of Simplon.

My reading of the sublime in Wordsworth will employ as its critical framework Lacanian psychoanalysis.[2] In addition to primary texts by Jacques Lacan himself, I will rely heavily on the work of Slavoj Žižek, whose writings provide some of the most important contributions to the theory of the sublime in recent years. The sublime in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, a poem inspired by a youthful walk across Sarum (an experience Wordsworth would explicitly associate in *The Prelude* with the taking up of his poetic vocation), represents a violent irruption of the Lacanian Real experienced by Wordsworth himself, a terrifying encounter which prompted the writing of the poem. The Real sublime (as I will call it) is the emotional substance of this experience. The development of his poetry over the course of the next decade is largely a chronicle of Wordsworth's compulsion to repeat, to circle around the Real without ever quite hitting upon it. Wordsworth's near-returns to this primal scene will eventually be distilled into the "sublime" as expressed in the Simplon Pass episode and elsewhere.

Much of Jacques Lacan's most profound work centers on the tension between the Real and Symbolic registers of human experience; and my interpretation of Wordsworth will depend on a close attention to this relationship. The Symbolic is the essence of everyday adult reality—reality above all as it is governed by language. When we go about our day to day lives—working, thinking, conversing, writing poems—we are firmly in the realm of the Symbolic, pushed by language along the chain of signifiers in a rhythm which is reassuring and comfortable (even if we are fundamentally alienated by it). But beneath the smooth functioning of the Symbolic is the Real which organizes it, without which it could not exist. The Real is typically

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[2] Psychoanalytic readings of Wordsworth are legion, but have tended to take the form of a traditional Freudian interpretation. Richard J. Onorato's extremely comprehensive study of *The Prelude* provides an excellent introduction to the orthodox Freudian reading of Wordsworth.

revealed in therapy as an originary trauma, unthinkable and of course *unspeakable*, anti-Symbolic. For the Symbolic to function properly, the Real must be concealed, and normally this is the case. But Lacan makes it clear that there are moments when the Symbolic fails, when we are given a terrifying glimpse of an unfamiliar Real which sustains all that is familiar.

The guiding thesis of this work is that Wordsworth himself had an experience of the traumatic Real while crossing Salisbury Plain in 1793. Lacan says that the typical response—the sane response—to such moments is to flee to the comforts of the Symbolic, and this was true of Wordsworth as well. Wordsworth's defense against his Real moment was to compose a fictionalized version of it, hoping to tame its terrors by placing them within the reassuring frame of language. In the short term, *Adventures on Salsibury Plain* served the purpose of distancing Wordsworth's Real; but its traumatic gibbet scene—and its critical depiction of the Real sublime as experienced by the poem's protagonist—would cast a long shadow over his poetry, shaping the development of his verse over the course of the Great Decade, and leading also to the construction of the egotistical sublime. Lacan says that the Real is fated to return, and when it periodically threatened to force its way to the surface of Wordsworth's consciousness, the poet's response was to move along the chain of signifiers to the composition of a new poem. It will be crucial to my interpretation of Wordsworth to read certain key poems as rewritings of earlier works, and ultimately of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. The unconscious goal of the Great Decade is the continual refinement of this early work's imagery into a less menacing, ever-less-Real form, finally the egotistical sublime.

The Real sublime of Wordsworth's early career is thus not an experience that the mature poet leaves behind; indeed one imagines that the manuscript of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* must have been a persistent and unpleasant reminder. *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* would not be published until 1843 (in an edited, inferior version entitled *Guilt and Sorrow*), but its imagery would haunt the Great Decade, most notably in the crucial Gibbet episode in Book XI of *The Prelude*. The development of the egotistical sublime in Wordsworth's work is a response to the return of the Real: the traumatic element pushes its way toward the surface, and Wordsworth—unable to keep it down—transforms its alien energy into something much more benign.

While the trauma in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* was assigned to a fictional character, Wordsworth is able to acknowledge the egotistical sublime as a part of his own psychic life. (It will not be incidental to my argument that the movement toward the egotistical sublime is a movement toward autobiography.)

In the end, I will see the egotistical sublime of *The Prelude* as a kind of compromise between Wordsworth's conscious and unconscious mind. Compelled to repeat, to circle around the Real which menaces him, Wordsworth's defensive, repressive gesture is to reinterpret it as something less threatening to his everyday equilibrium. This explains why the egotistical sublime is free of the oppressive elements to be found in a Kant or a Burke: the traditional natural sublime is too sublime for comfort, we might say, too suggestive of the terrors of the Real. As Weiskel so neatly demonstrates, what results is the semiotic opposite of the Kantian sublime, a transcendent moment where, if anything, it is the self which threatens to annihilate reality; a moment where the Alps fade before the awful might of a mind contemplating its own destiny.

The compromise-formation that is the sublime in Book VI of *The Prelude* is articulated through a screen memory, an originally Freudian concept which allows the poet to keep the Real at a comfortable distance. As I noted earlier (and as those familiar with the egotistical sublime will recall), these sublime moments are expressed in the most prominent Great Decade texts through the medium of memory; students of Freud will know that in a screen memory a recollection of the past (which may or may not have actually happened) is invoked in order to guard the self from a present psychic threat. It will perhaps be obvious that I believe the threat to which Wordsworth responds with the egotistical sublime is nothing other than the Real sublime. From this perspective, the sublime encounter, the oppressive moment, is something that occurs beyond the poem in some "real" (if not Real) experience of Wordsworth's (for example, the reading of one of his own early manuscripts); the sublime recovery is the composition of a new work, the articulation of the egotistical sublime. This explains the sense of the subject's relative safety in a poem like *Tintern Abbey*: *the egotistical sublime in Wordsworth is actually the recovery phase of the Real sublime.* Thus, the pitfall laid for the critics is the presentation of the conclusion of the sublime experience as if it were the entire experience.

The uniquely Wordsworthian notion of the egotistical sublime, strongly suggesting in its structure other versions of the natural sublime, encourages us in our reading of it as "the" sublime in the Wordsworth canon. In this way Wordsworth himself discourages us from taking a close look at the Real sublime as presented in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, and also from examining Great Decade poems like *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*, where the energy encountered in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is discharged in a less traditionally "sublime," but more threatening manner than it is in *Tintern Abbey* and similar works.

My notion that key texts of Wordsworth's Great Decade are fueled by a prior traumatic moment is broadly consistent with much recent criticism. The parallel with the work of New Historicism is perhaps the most obvious. New Historicism would see Wordsworth's poetry as inaugurated by a terrifying encounter with history (typically, the Terror that came in the wake of the French Revolution, described so movingly in *The Prelude*). Wordsworth's career in this reading becomes an extended effort to escape the thought of this trauma. In Alan Liu's influential reading, for example, Wordsworth stages encounters with Nature in an effort to occlude his ultimate conflict with history: in Book VI of *The Prelude*, the poet describes the natural world at the Simplon Pass as a way of avoiding consideration of a Napoleon whose fame is (at the time of composition) largely associated with Swiss mountain passes. But is my argument substantially the same as that of New Historicism? As a trauma that must be transcended via the egotistical sublime, is "the Real" another name for "history," and my project simply a translation of New Historicism into psychoanalytic jargon? The short answer is no; a full answer will require a more detailed rehearsal of the New Historicist reading of Wordsworth, as well as a discussion of this movement's own less obvious psychoanalytic underpinnings.

New Historicism and Psychoanalysis

The New Historicist movement, with respect to Romantic literature, was inaugurated in 1983 with the publication of Jerome J. McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*. McGann states the thesis of this important work concisely: "[T]he scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its works are determined by a Romantic Ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (1). Since its first appearance in Romantic studies, New Historicism has been a critical investigation (to use McGann's phrase) of both Romantic literature and previous criticisms of that literature. In a limited sense, of course, all criticism comports itself toward earlier critical work. But the acute sensitivity of New Historicism to the influence the author's perspective on the work may have on the critic's is surely an innovation (and may be the movement's lasting contribution to the study of Romanticism). To sum up the New Historicist position in a single inelegant phrase, we have tended to read Romantic literature the way its authors intended we read it. According to critics like McGann, a crucial myth shared by the writers and critics of Romanticism is the notion that great art can be transhistorical:

> One of the basic illusions of Romantic Ideology is that only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation by 'the world' of politics and money. Romantic poetry 'argues' this (and other) illusions repeatedly, and in the process it 'suffers' the contradictions of its own illusions and the arguments it makes for them. (13)

Romantic poets—and critics of that poetry—strive to occlude their groundedness in the machinery of history.

The poetry of Wordsworth often seems tailor-made for the New Historicist critique. The future poet was nineteen years old during the storming of the Bastille, and political issues are explored in such early works as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, perhaps inevitably. But by the time Wordsworth starts writing what has been traditionally considered his most important poetry, politics (or, more generally, history) has disappeared as an explicit subject. A representative Great Decade poem

like *Tintern Abbey* shows a speaker (presented as the poet himself) defining himself in relation to the natural world, seemingly unconcerned with larger social issues. According to the "traditional" reading of a critic like M. H. Abrams, an abandonment of politics necessarily coincides with the achievement of Romantic greatness. A quote from the seminal essay "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" will serve as an illustration:

> The visionary poems of the earlier 1790s and Shelley's earlier prophecies show imaginative audacity and invention, but they are not, it must be confessed, very good poems. The great Romantic poems were written not in the mood of revolutionary exaltation but in the later mood of revolutionary disillusionment or despair. (62)

From McGann's perspective, Wordsworth is deceiving himself into believing that a poem anchoring itself in the natural world can transcend the historical dimension (revolutionary despair or whatever), and a host of critics including Abrams have likewise been seduced by the power of Wordsworth's rhetoric.

The New Historicist perspective on Romantic literature and its criticism can perhaps be better illustrated through responses to a specific work. Consider the poetry from Book VI of *The Prelude* which I paraphrased at the outset (Wordsworth's own line break marks the transition from what I call Scene 1 to Scene 2):

> Upturning with a band
> Of travellers, from the Valais we had clomb
> Along the road that leads to Italy;
> A length of hours, making of these our guides,
> Did we advance, and having reached an inn
> Among the mountains, we together ate
> Our noon's repast, from which the travellers rose
> Leaving us at the board. Erelong we followed,
> Descending by the beaten road that led
> Right to a rivulet's edge, and there broke off;
> The only track now visible was one
> Upon the further side, right opposite,

And up a lofty mountain. This we took,
After a little scruple and short pause,
And climbed with eagerness – though not, at length,
Without surprize and some anxiety
On finding that we did not overtake
Our comrades gone before. By fortunate chance,
While every moment now encreased our doubts,
A peasant met us, and from him we learned
That to the place which had perplexed us first
We must descend, and there should find the road
Which in the stony channel of the stream
Lay a few steps, and then along its banks –
And further, that thenceforward all our course
Was downwards with the current of the stream.
Hard of belief, we questioned him again,
And all the answers which the man returned
To our inquiries, in their sense and substance
Translated by the feelings which we had,
Ended in this – that we had crossed the Alps.

Imagination!--lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my song
Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
Halted without a struggle to break through,
And now, recovering, to my soul I say
'I recognise thy glory'. In such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
Is with infinitude – and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.

> The mind beneath such banners militant
> Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
> That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
> That are their own perfection and reward—
> Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
> Which hides it like the overflowing Nile. (494-548)

From a New Historicist viewpoint, Abrams' analysis of Wordsworth's sublime recovery is telling: "[I]n the magnitude of his disappointment lies its consolation; for the flash of vision also reveals that infinite longings are inherent in the human spirit, and that the gap between his hope and the limits of possibility is the measure of man's dignity and greatness" (65). It will be clear to the reader that Abrams does not critically question the sincerity or veracity of Wordsworth's account of his experience; indeed his commentary may be taken as a paraphrase of it. Certainly Wordsworth *tells* the reader that infinite longings are inherent in the human spirit; for Abrams to agree with this notion without apparently interrogating it, McGann would tell us, is a sign of his immersion in Romantic Ideology.

To further illustrate this point, we may invoke Abrams' response to this characterization of the human mind under the sway of the sublime:

> The mind beneath such banners militant
> Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
> That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
> That are their own perfection and reward... (543-46)

Military imagery finds its way into the poem, but only as a metaphor for the mind—there is no direct historical referent. From Abrams' perspective, the figurative presence of banners militant in the passage is a kind of marker for their literal impossibility in the writing of the mature poet: "The militancy of overt political action has been transformed into the paradox of spiritual quietism: under such militant banners is no march, but a wise passiveness" (65). In this context, "banners militant" must be taken as metaphorical; the mind of Wordsworth in the Great Decade is, must be, apolitical.

Abrams' response provides a vivid contrast to the most prominent New Historicist reading of the Simplon Pass, in Alan Liu's *Wordsworth: The Sense of History*. For Liu, the poetic self is always grounded in history, even at (or especially at) those moments when history is not explicitly in the work. Though the self in actuality is "carved out" (5) of history, Wordsworth is able to occlude this through "an interposed veil of nature" (11). Nature in the poetry of the Great Decade becomes an elaborate backdrop, allowing the poet to deny his status as a historical figure:

> The description of the 1790 tour in Book 6, read in its own context, is a sustained effort to deny history by asserting nature as the separating mark constitutive of the egotistical self. It may be helpful to think of nature in its deflective capacity here as a mirror. The aim of Book 6 is to prevent the self from looking through nature to underlying history. Nature must instead reflect the self. (13)

Book VI of *The Prelude* (along with many other Wordsworth texts) becomes an elaborate construction of Nature as a screen for history. For Liu the specific historical detail screened by the Simplon Pass is Napoleon. Obviously Napoleon is not mentioned by name in the passage, but this is consistent with the concept of Romantic Ideology: the historical figure is not explicitly in the work because of the poet's delusion that art can be (and should be) divorced from the social realm.

But why Napoleon? Liu marshals an impressive array of secondary materials to make the argument that the seemingly transhistorical language of Book VI finds its ultimate signified in Bonaparte. The crucial word for Liu in the quoted passage is the "usurpation" the mind experiences at the hands of imagination. A number of contemporary accounts are cited to make the argument that by 1804 the term "usurper" had become inevitably associated with Napoleon in the public imagination. Additionally, Liu notes that during the composition of *The Prelude*, Swiss mountain passes like the one at Simplon had a specifically military connotation, and were in fact associated with Napoleon's greatest victories to date. Regardless of Wordsworth's intentions, conscious or not, the New Historicist position

would be that such details unavoidably shape the composition of the work; an Alpine pass, even a seemingly neutral word like "usurpation," can not be separated from its historical context, from its cultural meaning in England in 1804. In sum, a fourteen year old memory of rarefied Swiss air and metaphysical insight is an attempt to avoid the pressure history (in the form of usurping Napoleon) exerted on the European mind during the writing of *The Prelude*, an attempt that fails (assuming we read closely enough). It will come as no surprise that Liu's reading of the mind's "banners militant" differs widely from that of Abrams: "Here, even amid the military anthem, his act of purging Napoleon begins. *Wordsworth's stress in 1804 that the Imagination is its own reward, and so eschews spoils and trophies, should be seen to reject precisely Napoleon's famed spoliations*" (29). Whereas from Abrams' perspective Wordsworth's invocation of military imagery is ironic, for Liu it can not be ironic in the same sense: the historical is always in the background of the scene—the back of the mind—and can never be simply a metaphor.

New Historicism has been the most influential movement in Wordsworth criticism in recent years; as such, it has become the biggest target for criticism. Generally speaking, such attacks have seen the New Historicists as making a value judgment about Wordsworth's lack of political or social commitment. New Historicists, such a reading goes, would be in agreement with a critic like Abrams in seeing a young, politically active man giving way to an apolitical poet defining himself in terms of nature or the imagination; whereas Abrams would see such a movement as necessary to the full flowering of Wordsworth's poetic genius, a New Historicist critic would find it ethically suspect, a selfish response to the dashing of youthful hopes. Such an interpretation sees the critique of New Historicism as always coupled with an *ought*: Wordsworth is obliged to discuss the conquests of Napoleon directly, rather than obliquely through description of a vacation experience in the Alps; Wordsworth should use his 1798 trip to the Wye as an occasion to examine the plight of dispossessed locals rather than focusing on the workings of his own mind (to invoke a brilliant reading of *Tintern Abbey* by Marjorie Levinson); and so on.

To their credit, historicist critics have in many cases already anticipated these objections. McGann claims that his goal is not attack a poet like Wordsworth for his lack of political nerve, but rather to

enhance our understanding of what he was able to accomplish in the face of the day's historical stresses: "To foster such a [New Historicist] view of past works of art can only serve to increase our admiration for their special achievements and our sympathy for what they created within the limits which constrained them—as it were, for their grace under pressure" (2). The goal is not to belittle the writer's work, but to provide a fuller context for it. Ultimately, the key issue in this debate seems to be whether the New Historicists respect Wordsworth as an artist; given that their analysis might seem reductive to a more formalist-minded critic, I am prepared to accept that they do.

My interpretation of New Historicism is somewhat different, and my reservations about its writings take a different form. As I have indicated, my reading of Wordsworth will be largely based on Lacanian psychoanalysis. A psychoanalytic reading will perhaps be seen as being by definition radically at odds with any sort of historicist critique. What I would like to suggest is that New Historicism is itself in actuality a psychoanalytic criticism, and that my reservations about the movement's reading of Wordsworth stem from my feeling that New Historicism misreads the repression at work in his poetry. This will require a bit of explaining.

My understanding of New Historicism as a psychoanalytic movement is deeply indebted to a remarkable article by J. Douglas Kneale entitled "Symptom and Scene in Freud and Wordsworth." Kneale uses an early Freud essay, "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896), in order to draw connections between Freud and historicism as represented by Liu. "The Aetiology of Hysteria" is notable for introducing the so-called seduction theory of hysteria—briefly, the notion that hysterical symptoms in the adult are the result of childhood sexual abuse. Freud would soon become dissatisfied with the seduction theory, abandoning it for the oedipus complex of classical psychoanalysis, which famously (and infamously) located adult neurosis in childhood fantasy rather than external abuse.

According to the seduction theory, curing the adult symptom requires locating its origin in childhood trauma. As Kneale notes: "Only by tracing a figural path from the surface 'symptom' (*semeion*, or sign) to the psychical ground or 'scene,' Freud suggests, can a successful reading occur: the effacement of the surface by the depth" (135). Revealing the primal scene beneath it, so the seduction theory went,

would cause the symptom to disappear. In this formulation, of course, a hierarchy is implied: the scene is real, the "truth"; the symptom is the merely apparent, the "false." Kneale maps out related hierarchical oppositions pertaining to the Freud essay:

surface	manifest	external	behaviour	symptom
depth	latent	internal	motivation	scene (138)

Kneale makes his connection to New Historicism by invoking Liu's own explicit hierarchy:

Self
Nature
History (142)

In Liu's arrangement, of course, Nature is merely a screen occluding the true opposition between Self and History. From Kneale's perspective, the parallel with Freud is obvious:

> History, for Liu, is the 'base' or ground upon which both nature and self are built, and here, as in Freud's model, depth is privileged over surface, history valorized over nature and self. The two upper levels become 'denials' or repressions or 'symptoms' for the real 'scene' of history. (142-43)

In this reading, history becomes the traumatic event which creates the poetic self. More specifically, we might say the young Wordsworth is traumatized by the dark turn taken by the French Revolution; this trauma is repressed by the poet, and the resulting symptom is Romantic Ideology, with its delusions of transhistorical grandeur. From this perspective, New Historicist critical practice becomes a sort of therapy: the patient is analyzed, the symptom is identified, and the critic works backward to locate the scene (history) which causes it. Once the scene is recovered, the symptom disappears, and the patient is "cured," if only in some ideal realm where the critical text is a successful case history.

The dissatisfaction I find in New Historical therapeutic procedure is that the rigid hierarchical opposition on which Liu's

analysis is based does not stand up to close scrutiny—there is no ground for the self, historical or otherwise, which is any more reliably identifiable or "true" than that self. As Kneale notes, it did not take Freud long to abandon the seduction theory:

> For Freud in 1896, the scene is historical, the symptom is textual. However, in his own dismantling of this hierarchical opposition a year later, the crucial discovery Freud made—and the discovery that allowed psychoanalysis proper to develop, distinct from a sociology of incest—was that *the scene or ground of historical event also turned out to be textual,* that is, fantasy, wish, or myth. (140)

Freud came to realize that the adult self is not grounded on a historical moment external to the childhood self, but rather on oedipal fantasies which are more or less universal, transhistorical.

The Lacanian interpretation of Freud I advocate is broadly consistent with this in terms of analyzing the "patient," in that the Real is—like the oedipal drama—universal. In addition to this, the inherent ambiguity of the Real makes working our way back to it from a particular poetic text a very problematic affair. If New Historicism would see history as the scene underlying Wordsworth's poetic symptom, I would rather identify the Real as occupying this position:

	New Historicism:	Lacanian Reading:
symptom	Wordsworth's poetry	Symbolic (in form of poetry)
———	———	———
scene	history	Real

But could "history" simply be another name for the Real, in the sense that history is regarded by New Historicism as a trauma that organizes the poetic self? The key here is the relationship between symptom and scene, which New Historicism believes can be resolved as a one-to-one pairing, e.g.,

the Simplon Pass episode

Napoleon

But from a Lacanian perspective things can not be so straightforward. It is here appropriate to invoke Lacan's famous algebraic interpretation of Saussurrean linguistics,

$$\frac{S}{s},$$

where "S" represents the signifier and "*s*" the signified. Given that the signifier identifies the realm of language, and that the signified in Lacan often stands for the repressed, the following parallels may be asserted:

symptom	Symbolic	S
———	———	–
scene	*Real*	*s*

A well-known feature of Lacanian theory is that the "bar" separating S and *s* is more properly thought of as a barrier precluding the sort of one-to-one relationship between symptom and scene presumed by New Historicism. We can not confidently work our way from a signifier like "usurpation" to a signified such as Napoleon, because "usurpation" is caught up in the chain of signifiers; to invoke Lacan's own rather poetic phrasing, we would say that individual signifiers are "rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings" (*Écrits* 153). In the chain of signifiers words refer not to translinguistic "meanings" but rather to other words.

This may seem a rather dismal portrait of language, but another way of saying this is that the smooth functioning of the Symbolic helps to keep the traumatic Real at bay, below the surface—most of the time. At those moments when Wordsworth feels himself menaced by the Real—when the Real threatens to cross the bar—the poet simply slides

along the chain of signifiers to the composition of another poem. It is by way of such sliding that the traumatic Real of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* evolves into the egotistical sublime of the Great Decade. The effect—or the unconsciously hoped-for effect—of Wordsworth's poetic career is a continual strengthening of the bar separating his words from the Real.

We can now more explicitly depict the difference between our interpretation and that of critics such as Alan Liu. New Historicists see the relationship between symptom and scene as porous, which I indicate with a broken bar:

symptom	Simplon Pass episode
	- - - - - - - - - - - -
scene	Napoleon

In contrast, I assume a rigid barrier between an individual Wordsworth text and its ultimate psychic source:

symptom	*Adventures on Salisbury Plain* →	...series of intermediate poems... →	Simplon Pass episode
	———		
scene	Real		

The distinction between my approach and that of New Historicism becomes quite explicit here, with important implications for my study. While the Real may be seen as the ultimate energy fueling a particular poem, working our way back to this scene is not the direct process New Historicism would have it be. The nature of my analysis is not, by and large, to see poems as rewritings of a Real outside the work, but rather as rewritings of other poems. Working our way backward through the Great Decade's use of key imagery, we find ourselves at *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* and it is only in this work, in a devastating trance experienced by Wordsworth's fictional representation of himself, that we will find direct evidence of the traumatic Real. And even here the Real will remain to a large extent veiled, an event beyond the poem which attempts to depict it in language. The true encounter with the

Real happens to William Wordsworth himself, and the Real as the poem gives it to us may be profitably regarded as a linguistic, Symbolic defense against the poet's own Real. ("It's just a poem. It happens to a fictional character.") Thus, even in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* the Real does not cross the bar into the Symbolic; rather we would say that the composition of this poem *reconstructs* the bar, puts the Real back in its place. The course of the Great Decade is, among (many) other things, a sustained effort to maintain and strengthen this barrier.

This leads to an obvious question: what was the nature of Wordsworth's own encounter with the Real? Or, what functioned as the traumatic Real for Wordsworth? The Real typically manifests itself in therapy as an unspeakable trauma, and a familiarity with Wordsworth's biography at the outset of his career certainly provides us with possibilities. Perhaps the most obvious traumatic source for Wordsworth's poetry—and of course the option typically selected by the New Historicism—would be disillusionment related to the French Revolution. Certain aspects of the poetry I will examine may suggest a Revolutionary Terror behind Wordsworth's own personal terror, but I will strive at every step to be conservative about "identifying" the Real. An important element of the Real is that it doggedly resists expression in language. I must acknowledge at the outset that for the Real to truly remain the Real, there will be much I will *not* be able to say about it.

With a certain degree of confidence I will claim a time and place—the summer of 1793 on Salisbury Plain—for Wordsworth's encounter with the traumatic Real. The reasons for this are straightforward, and no doubt open to debate. As I have already indicated, the character who encounters the Real in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is obviously based on Wordsworth, and his travels across Salisbury Plain are just as clearly based on Wordsworth's own similar journey of 1793. Additionally we have the poet's testimony in Book XII of *The Prelude* that his walk across Sarum was the event that made him a poet, which of course nicely coincides with my notion that the Real made him a poet. But beyond "1793 on Salisbury Plain," what can be said? *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is obviously the best testimony we have on Wordsworth's Real, and just as obviously can not be trusted. Did Wordsworth—like his fictional stand-in—have a traumatic encounter with a gibbeted criminal? Not necessarily, any more than Wordsworth was, like his character, a sailor. *Adventures on*

Salisbury Plain is a work of *fiction*; with respect to the Real, we might say that all language is fictional. In examining individual poems, I will make the argument that Wordsworth's Real experience on Salisbury Plain came to be associated in the poet's mind with his certainly traumatic relationship with Annette Vallon. (Wordsworth's walk across Sarum occurred a few months after his forced separation from his French lover, so we can certainly assume that his thoughts were often occupied with Annette at the time of his encounter with the Real.) With the Real, however, I believe we should be more afraid of saying too much than of saying too little. Again, I will find the influence of poem upon poem to be a more fruitful avenue of discussion than an attempt to directly connect a particular work with its traumatic source. Such a reticence about moving from work to trauma will be one of the key ways I hope to differentiate myself from the New Historicism.

Having distinguished my general approach from that of New Historicism, I would like to add a comment about the historicist analysis of specific texts. Why is a reading of Wordsworth such as Liu's so persuasive, so plausible? One thing Kneale's article on symptom and scene does not discuss in detail is *why* Freud abandoned the seduction theory: to put it simply, because the theory worked too well. When he first tested the seduction theory through actual analysis, Freud felt vindicated when his patients, with his help, were able to work their way back to memories of childhood abuse at the hands of a family elder. But he eventually became troubled when he realized that *all* of his patients were uncovering such memories. Were all of his patients actually abused, or was something else at work? Freud came to believe that his own theories were contaminating the clinical process (a possibility to which he would be sensitive for the remainder of his career), and that he and his patients were collaborating in the creation of false memories. His own motive for such "creativity" was of course his belief in the seduction theory; when he decided that the patients' motive was the oedipus complex, classical psychoanalysis was born.

What I would like to suggest is that New Historicist analysis amounts to the critical equivalent of such a self-fulfilling therapeutic prophecy. New Historicism finds history behind Wordsworth's poetry because that is what it is looking for. With the principle that the surface or "text" of a Wordsworth poem is a screen for a truth which is repressed, we can unfortunately define that truth as whatever we want.

With the hierarchical opposition undergirding New Historicism, the very *absence* of historical reference in a Wordsworth poem is taken as proof of its *presence* as the motivation for the poem: indeed, if direct historical commentary were made by the poem it would be an argument against its being an instance of Romantic Ideology.

The relationship between "scene" and "symptom" in New Historicist discourse has largely been responsible for the backlash against the movement. A New Historicist reading of a poem can not be verified by direct reference to the poem itself; instead we must accept that the text is the transformation of a historical moment prior to it. To revert to Liu's analysis of the Simplon Pass, I must ask again, Why Napoleon? Liu's description of the passage as motivated by Bonaparte is brilliant, but no more plausible than any number of other readings guided by the scene-symptom opposition. The Simplon Pass episode displays the effects of Romantic Ideology because Romantic Ideology is from the outset the object of Liu's search. Or as Thomas McFarland notes in a withering attack on Marjorie Levinson's reading of *Tintern Abbey*:

> In such opening out from a specific presence to a totality of absence, everything is interlinked, and in that apprehension Levinson's attempt to join the French Revolution, the sociology of the poor, the rise of urban pollution, and the history of monasticism to Wordsworth's poem would be valid, but so would the relation of the poem to Virgil's *Georgics* or to the construction of the Parthenon—all these things could ultimately be traced from the poem, but at the same time they would be critically null; for their absence, to utilize the phrase of Hegel, inhabits a night in which all cows are black. (12)

I intend to keep Freud's experience with the seduction theory before me as an example, a cautionary tale to be invoked at those moments when I am too quick to identify a specific trauma behind a particular work.

The Real Sublime, and a Brief Overview

Describing the Real in terms of the sublime—or, for that matter, the sublime in terms of the Real—is somewhat unconventional, but I am pointed in this direction by Slavoj Žižek, who deftly uses Lacanian psychoanalysis and German Idealism to comment on one another. The parallels between the Kantian and Lacanian projects are developed at some length in Žižek's *Tarrying With the Negative.* Briefly, the argument is that the relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal in Kant is analogous to that between the Real and Symbolic in Lacan. The phenomenal realm in Kant is that which is perceived as everyday physical reality, whereas the noumenal—the domain of the Thing-in-itself—is its necessary but unseen substructure, the true ground of "reality." In Lacan everyday psychic reality is governed by the Symbolic register, but the Symbolic is organized around a traumatic Real. This Real is normally not experienced by the subject, but without it "reality" as we know it could not exist. As the natural sublime in Kant represents a moment when one's ordinary connection to the phenomenal is disrupted, allowing an intuition of the noumenal, I argue that a Real event is an occasion when one's anchor in the Symbolic fails, allowing a momentary glimpse of what lies beneath ordinary psychic reality. The typical response to this sublime moment is to flee back to the comfort of the Symbolic, to language for its own sake—the word that "means nothing except that it is a word" (*Seminar II* 170), in Lacan's phrase. The structure of the Real sublime can be discerned in examples offered by both Lacan and Žižek, even by Freud—assuming we read Freud as Lacan and Žižek would have us read him.

In certain unusual circumstances, those confronted with the Real sublime become what Žižek calls "sublime figures," and I believe this is what happens to the protagonist of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain.* Žižek locates sublime figures in a place "between the two deaths," that is, between literal, biological (or "real") death and Symbolic or cultural death. Normally, one would expect the two deaths to be simultaneous for an individual, and, when they are not, that person becomes a sublime figure. As an example of Symbolic death preceding biological death, Žižek offers Antigone, condemned by Creon and "dead" to Theban society long before the conclusion of Sophocles' play. This

disjunction between literal and Symbolic death "imbues her character with sublime beauty" (*Sublime Object* 135). An example of the opposite case—actual death occurring before Symbolic—is to be found in the ghost of Hamlet's father, murdered before he can settle his accounts, "which is why he returns as a frightful apparition until his debt has been repaid" (135).

The protagonist of Wordsworth's poem, an unnamed sailor, has been driven by want and despair to commit murder. In the aftermath of his crime, he wanders the countryside aimlessly (he is a likely source for Coleridge's Ancient Mariner), without steady companions. As he makes his way across Salisbury Plain, he happens upon a dead body swinging in an iron gibbet, and is overwhelmed, driven into a trance. I see this trance as the physical symptom of the character's encounter with the traumatic Real. When he recovers from this sublime experience, he is changed, and moves in relatively quick succession through a series of acts culminating in his giving himself up to the authorities; at poem's end, he suffers the same punishment, hanging in his own gibbet, continuing the cycle for any guilt-stricken criminals who might happen along.

My contention is that the Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is a sublime figure, and that the conclusion of the poem is predicated on his eventual recognition of this. His sublimity is that of Antigone; the crime he has committed has annihilated his Symbolic self, severing every tie to society. He has no family, no connection to any individual or community that can be more than fleeting, not even a name (at least in the narration and dialogue of the poem). He is a murderer, and society's Symbolic judgment is not ambiguous: he is, as we would say, a dead man, and it is only a matter of time. Of course, as Wordsworth makes clear, the Sailor is not unaware of the punishment that awaits him (he wanders "the murderer's fate to shun"); but he is in denial about his Symbolic death and the consequent emptiness of his existence, and one can imagine him continuing to cling to his non-life, wandering indefinitely. Before he can come to terms with his act, before he can settle his accounts, his destiny must be made Real for him.

This is accomplished by the encounter with the gibbeted figure. This apparition of the Sailor's future self is both Symbolically and literally dead, a corpse swinging in the wind, suspended in the

instrument of society's final judgment. The Sailor is no more Symbolically alive than the corpse, and he is thrown back upon their only remaining difference, the brute fact of his biological life—or, as it is often formulated in Lacanian discourse, the Real. The Real is the location where the Symbolic fails; that which can not be symbolized, given a form in language. In Lacanian discourse it is often associated with a nauseating physicality. Lacan's analysis of the Freudian dream of Irma's injection—for my purposes his most important discussion of the Real—captures the essence of the terror that can be associated with this phenomenon. In his famous dream (the first analyzed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*) Freud examines a patient; looking down her throat he sees ambiguous white scabs. In Lacan's reading these scabs represent a Real which is purely biological in nature, a life force which is radically unassimilable:

> There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of *you are this – You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness.* (*Seminar II* 154-55)

Seeing the dead man in the gibbet leads the Sailor to a confrontation with his own Real, the pulsing and formless life force which is the only thing that differentiates him from the corpse. Encounters with the Real are by their nature traumatic, hence the Sailor's trance; but upon his recovery, he realizes (on a level no review of the penal code could have accomplished) that he has already lost everything meaningful a human being can lose. Once the Sailor has recognized his Symbolic death, all that remains for him is his biological demise, and he goes relatively quickly to his own gibbet. The composure with which he accepts his doom ("in his breast a dreadful quiet reign'd") is not unlike the "sublime beauty" Žižek finds in the resignation of Antigone.

What makes the Sailor's experience unique in the Wordsworth canon is the eerieness of the encounter with the gibbeted figure, the surreal impression one gets (confirmed of course by the poem's conclusion) that the Sailor is meeting his own double, his future self. This encounter with the Real is something that will be repressed as Wordsworth's poetry turns inevitably toward autobiography. As we shall see, Wordsworth's later poetry is littered with encounters with what are almost—but not quite—doubles for the poet, and the relief the poet shows at encountering an other which remains finally other is the unconscious relief that the Real sublime has not happened. Of course, as I have suggested, the Real sublime *does* menace the poet in some world of his own experience, and the composition of the poem—and the expression of the egotistical sublime, most notably—is the recovery phase of this experience; when the Real threatens to cross over into Wordsworth's everyday Symbolic existence, a new poem must be written.

Seen from this perspective, the trajectory of Wordsworth's poetry in the Great Decade is a history of avoiding the trauma associated with the Real. As the example of Antigone illustrates, the Real sublime brings with it the possibility of an ethical choice. Confronted with her dead brother and a clear moral obligation, Antigone *elects* to become a sublime figure. Wordsworth's Sailor displays a similar heroism in the face of the gibbet, making himself finally accountable for his crime. What of Wordsworth himself? Did his traumatic experience on Salisbury Plain offer him the same possibility for accountability, for an authentic comportment to his trauma? If so, Wordsworth repressed this choice, and his poetry after *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* consistently—though in a variety of ways—avoids the Real sublime. This raises the question of how to judge Wordsworth's actions, a question to which this study will perhaps remain ambivalent.[3] Can we fault Wordsworth for repressing his traumatic Real, when this is in fact what the Real demands of us all? Can we blame him for not being Antigone? The Sailor's response to the gibbet perhaps stages the response Wordsworth unconsciously wants to—but is unable to—make to his own Real. Wordsworth's first poetic solution

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[3] My most direct confrontation with this question can be found in my conclusion.

for the terrors of the Real sublime was to repress not the experience itself but his identity as the one entranced. It was a makeshift solution, one that served its immediate purpose of keeping the Real at bay; but the failure of this fiction to satisfy would lead Wordsworth to an entirely different kind of repression in *The Prelude*, and the path between these two points is the Great Decade.

With respect to the sublime, I believe my interpretation helps to explain Wordsworth's relationship to (and inconsistency with) the received tradition. Critics have tended to see the Wordsworthian sublime as some version of either the Burkeian or Kantian model, and as I have already suggested (and as Weiskel definitively shows), such readings are inevitably strained, trying (often ingeniously) to see the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth's mature work as its opposite. The key to my reading is to see the later poetry of the Great Decade in the context of the trauma of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, to be suspicious of Wordsworth's own identification of works like the Simplon Pass episode and *Tintern Abbey* as "the sublime" in his work. The Real sublime shares many features with the Kantian and Burkeian sublimes, and it is this very continuity that forces Wordsworth to develop a notion of sublimity that is at odds with the tradition. A related benefit of my interpretation, in my opinion, is that it focuses attention on an important early work which until fairly recently have been largely ignored in the study of Wordsworth. In the past, critics have typically privileged the later works of the Great Decade, seeing such poems as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* as the immature efforts of an artist who had not yet found his voice. It will be obvious that my reading tends to reverse this emphasis, seeing an early Real authenticity from which Wordsworth recoils in his "maturity." My reading will hopefully be a small contribution to a more balanced critical perspective on which works in the Wordsworth canon are "important" enough to deserve our attention.

Chapter one will be a detailed discussion of both *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and an earlier version of that poem entitled *Salisbury Plain,* along with an elaboration of the Real sublime.

Sometime between the writing of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and 1798, Wordsworth developed the egotistical sublime as the recovery phase of the Real sublime. Chapter two will primarily be a

discussion of *Tintern Abbey*, the first great poem of the egotistical sublime.

The egotistical sublime is associated from the beginning with autobiography. Contemporary with the poems discussed in chapter two, a new type of poem will appear, in which certain elements of the Real sublime repressed in the egotistical sublime resurface. I refer to these poems as trauma poems, and chapter three will deal with the two most notable such poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* years, *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*. In these poems, as in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, a traumatic encounter occurs, but the object in the end fails to be a double for the subject, and the Real sublime as such fails to materialize. Both *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn* echo the imagery of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, and they share the device of a fictional character experiencing the trauma. In the world of the early trauma poems, William Wordsworth is elsewhere; namely, he is by the banks of the Wye, calmly contemplating the egotistical sublime through the distancing vehicle of memory.

When, in the late 1790s, the trauma of the Real sublime splits into the egotistical sublime and trauma poetry, one of the primary psychic benefits is that neither type of poem bears the full brunt of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*'s energy. In this way the egotistical sublime and trauma poetry serve as safety valves for one another. Unconsciously, Wordsworth will try to further exploit this quality by integrating the two types of verse in *The Prelude*, assigning trauma to the experiences of childhood and the egotistical sublime to those of the adult. (This evolutionary notion of human consciousness is hinted at as early as *Tintern Abbey*, with the suggestion that the Wordsworth of 1793 could not have had the metaphysical insights of 1798.) Obviously, the difference between trauma poetry and the egotistical sublime is vast, and Wordsworth in *The Prelude* will find the necessity for a transitional experience. This bridge between the traumatic and the "sublime" (containing elements of both) I call the encounter poem. The first important completed work of this type is *Resolution and Independence*, the subject—along with the Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799—of chapter four. Encounter poems contain serious meditations on the meaning of human existence, and there is the *suggestion* of a world beyond the senses, but the framework of the egotistical sublime—and its crucial notion of metaphysical insight—is implied rather than confidently stated. I would also remark that encounter poems do not conclude with

the sublime affirmation of a work like *Tintern Abbey*. Such poems are, however, autobiographical, Wordsworth speaking as Wordsworth. Like the trauma poems, an encounter is made with a figure who could be (but finally is not) the protagonist's double; but the emotion inspired is a vague sense of unease rather than terror.

It is only in 1805 with the completion of Wordsworth's epic that trauma poetry, encounter poetry and the egotistical sublime will coexist in a single work, if it is appropriate to label *The Prelude* a single work. If various ostensibly unrelated *Prelude* passages are read together, the sublime emotion of the gibbet scene in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* may be seen in the background. Chapter five will discuss the integration of Wordsworth's three defenses against the Real in the story of the poet's life. In the 1805 *Prelude* the traumatic moments will belong to early childhood (the Gibbet episode occurs at the age of five, the Drowned Man at nine). Episodes of encounter poetry – the transitional phase – will occur along the border between late adolescence and early adulthood (the Discharged Soldier episode at age eighteen, that of the Blind Beggar at twenty). The egotistical sublime will be reserved for mature adulthood: Wordsworth has his sublime encounter with Imagination *as he is writing the Simplon Pass episode* at age thirty-three. In *The Prelude*'s tripartite model of emotional development, trauma gives way to moments of encounter, which give way to the egotistical sublime. Traumatic moments are thus acknowledged to be a part of one's existence, but are relegated to a childhood so distant as to be almost mythical; for the adult Wordsworth, the 1805 *Prelude* argues, trauma has been left behind forever. Ever since his own traumatic moment on Salisbury Plain in 1793, Wordsworth had been struggling to discover a workable defense against the Real sublime; in the story of the growth of the poet's mind, he is able to displace this alienating energy along various points of his personal timeline, thereby lessening the burden each individual moment is forced to bear. The great achievement of the 1805 *Prelude* (or one of many great achievements) is that Wordsworth's relationship to the Real sublime acquires a kind of stability. After completing this text, Wordsworth will continue to revise his autobiography over the course of more than three decades, but these changes tend to be stylistic in nature, and do nothing to alter the model of emotional growth established in 1805.

1. The Real Sublime In and Around the Salisbury Plain Poems

A doctor learns that one of his patients, a young woman who has stopped treatment for the summer, is still suffering from symptoms. Concerned how this "failure" might be interpreted by his colleagues, he goes home and writes a case history for the patient. That night, he has a dream.

Dream, Part I: The doctor is hosting a party with a number of guests, including the patient. He immediately confronts her, insisting that any symptoms she still has are her own fault. She tells him that she is at that moment suffering from pains in the throat and abdomen. After first resisting, she opens her mouth, and he looks down her throat. He sees some white and whitish gray scabs, is unsure what they represent.

Dream, Part II: The doctor is joined by three colleagues, who assist him in examining the patient. No definitive identification of the scabs is made, but an explanation for her remaining symptoms is discovered: one of the other doctors has recently given the patient an injection of trimethylamine (and as this is noted the dreamer sees its chemical formula floating before him). Such injections are often given when not appropriate, and there is also the possibility that the syringe was dirty.

The dreamer is Sigmund Freud, and the dream belongs to 1895, one year before the publication of "The Aetiology of Hysteria," and a few years before the birth of psychoanalysis proper. The dream of Irma's injection, as it has come to be known, held a singular importance for

Freud. It is the first dream analyzed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), chosen, Freud tells us, because it has an obvious motivation in the events of the previous evening. In a letter from 1900 to his colleague Wilhelm Fliess, Freud goes so far as to wonder fancifully if the house where he had this dream would one day bear a plaque with the following inscription: "In this house on July 24th, 1895, the secret of dreams was revealed to Dr. Sigmund Freud" (*Interpretation of Dreams* 154).

Whereas for Freud the Irma dream is a wish-fulfillment (grounded in the need to find a cause other than the inadequacy of his treatment for the persistence of symptoms), in Lacan it becomes a parable for the interrelations between the three registers of human experience: the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Lacan's account is to be found in *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, the transcript of Seminar II.[4] Looking down Irma's throat becomes an encounter with the Real, a traumatic moment of uncanny intensity:

> Hence there's an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety *par excellence*. (164)

What seems a relatively normal moment of diagnostic uncertainty causes Freud to lose his very grip on the world as he typically experiences it.

Part II of the dream represents the dreamer's reassuring flight back into his everyday existence, which tends to be the domain of the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Within the narrative of the dream, the key to Freud's recovery is the sudden appearance of the other doctors. According to Freud's own interpretation, again, this is simply a matter of wish-fulfillment: the dreamer has trouble making a diagnosis, and

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[4] At the twilight of rememberable work on this project, Joan Copjec's excellent discussion in *Read My Desire* pointed me to this text (I think).

other physicians magically appear to help out. In Lacan's reading, conversely, the doctors help out by giving the dreamer an opportunity for an Imaginary identification with his colleagues in the medical profession. The Imaginary is most famously associated in Lacan with the mirror stage, that period in very early childhood when the infant comes to identify with its own specular image. In looking at its reflection, the child is able for the first time to develop the notion of a coherent and whole self. The mirror stage—and the Imaginary identification which is its substance—is the necessary first step in developing personality as we know it. Though the Imaginary is most often associated in discussions of Lacan with the mirror stage, Lacan makes it clear that Imaginary identifications are a common part of adult existence, that they occur at those moments when we need to bolster our sense of self, of "who we are." In the dream of Irma's injection, the Imaginary appears as a first step in recovering from the tremendous anxiety associated with the Real. Encounters with the Real make the world an uncanny place: we no longer know our surroundings or even the self that occupies them. Thrown into such a traumatic environment, Freud is rescued by the magical arrival of the doctors. At the moment he is able to make an Imaginary identification with these gentlemen—in effect to realize that *he too is a doctor*—the Real is already starting to lose its hold on him. There is a comfort to this sort of identification, a sense of coming back to one's self. Most importantly, the Imaginary in Freud's dream serves as a bridge to the Symbolic.

The Symbolic in Lacan is the realm of language, and once the doctors have served their immediate purpose of occasioning an Imaginary identification on Freud's part, it is not surprising that he engages them in conversation, as they work in concert to diagnose the patient. As Lacan says, the Real is that before which all words cease, and the fact that the dreamer is now once again able to move along the chain of signifiers is the clearest indicator that he has begun to recover from the trauma associated with Irma's scabs. For Lacan the Symbolic is associated with a fundamental alienation, but this alienation is not without a comfortable quality: as adults, it is what we are used to, and clearly preferable to the traumatic Real. Given Freud's psychic needs at this point in the dream, the words he shares with the other doctors are more important as ends in themselves than as a means of curing the patient. The chain of signifiers leads the doctors finally to the chemical

formula for trimethylamine, floating insubstantially (a signifier without a signified) before Freud's vision. Unsurprisingly, the particularity of the formula for trimethylamine, as a marker for a treatment that should not have been prescribed, is not relevant to Lacan's analysis: "Just when the hydra has lost its heads, a voice which is nothing more than *the voice of no one* causes the trimethylamine formula to emerge, as the last word on the matter, the word for everything. And this word means nothing except that it is a word" (170).

In analyzing the dream of Irma's injection, Lacan is most interested in describing a fundamental antagonism between the Real as uncanny and the Symbolic as everyday. By contrast, the Imaginary is simply seen as a bridge from one to the other: once Freud *identifies* with being a doctor, it becomes easy to fall into the language of physicians, and thereby to find the comfort of the Symbolic. Though all language is equally efficacious for the dreamer's psychic needs, he must first be pointed in the direction of specific words, and this is the function served by the Imaginary: once Freud thinks of himself as a doctor, he can start talking like a doctor, tossing around words like trimethylamine. As Malcolm Bowie perceptively notes, even though the Symbolic has a kind of "priority" in our adult lives, the Imaginary "gives it content, and work to do" (99).

In Lacanian discourse, the Symbolic is the rule in adult human experience, the Real an extremely rare exception. An encounter with the Real can be extraordinarily traumatic (the Real is often discovered in the therapeutic environment as trauma), and in this sense everyday Symbolic existence may in some instances be seen as a reaction to or a recovery from the traumatic Real. In this way the Real becomes in a sense the unseen substructure of the everyday self. One need only take Freud as an example, reading the dream of Irma's injection from a Lacanian perspective: after the horrifying vision of Irma's scabs, the doctor is able to come back to himself, but this Symbolic self is radically changed, has become the person who will invent psychoanalysis. (Or to invoke Freud's own rather more poetic phrasing, the secret of dreams has been revealed to him.)

In this sense that the Real might be seen as a foundation for the self, we rarely have access to it (strictly speaking, Lacan tells us, it is the impossible). Its designation as "the Real" is a supreme irony on Lacan's part, in that the Real and "reality" as we know it, founded on the

Symbolic (and, to a lesser extent, the Imaginary), are mutually exclusive. The dream of Irma's injection (as interpreted by Lacan) suggests in broad outline the lineaments of the traditional natural sublime. In Kant the natural world is transcended by a sublime experience which reveals its supersensible underpinnings. The Real accomplishes the linguistic equivalent of this operation: just as the Kantian sublime provides an intuition of a metaphysical realm beyond the "real world," so the Real gives an experience of a frightening otherworld removed from everyday Symbolic reality. To the subject's emotional response to this encounter I assign the term *Real sublime*. For both the philosopher and the psychoanalyst, these sublime moments are fleeting; flashes of the invisible world (*Prelude* VI. 535-36), as Wordsworth would say. In a theorist for whom language is as central as it is for Lacan, such an experience of the Real is every bit as significant as the natural sublime is for a Burke or a Kant.

The relationship between Real and Symbolic, as played out in the dream of Irma's injection, is the model I would like to apply to the Wordsworth canon. I hypothesize that Wordsworth, in crossing Salisbury Plain in 1793, had an encounter with the Real, a singular and defining moment unlike any other in the poet's life. One might wonder what specifically triggered this traumatic experience, but it could have been anything (and certainly need not have been anything as dramatic as a corpse swinging in a gibbet, which I will finally see in the Salisbury Plain poems as a fiction created out of Wordsworth's compulsion to be punished for "crimes" committed in his personal life). In the Irma dream, Freud largely recovers from the Real sublime by conversing with the other doctors, and by focusing on the formula for trimethylamine—in short, through language. Similarly, Wordsworth's recovery from his own Real is the composition of poetry. Indeed, it is my belief that this traumatic experience of the Real in 1793 is the kernel around which Wordsworth's body of poetry is organized. (In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth tells us that his youthful walk across Sarum is what made him a poet, though his interpretation of this originary event differs from mine. In seeing the verses on Salisbury Plain as inaugural, it is worth noting that they are not the first the poet composed. Wordsworth himself dismissed his earliest poetry—including the Salisbury Plain poems—as juvenilia.) We see here a broad parallel to

the dream of Irma's injection, moving from Real to Imaginary to Symbolic:

	Real →	Imaginary →	Symbolic
Freud	Irma's scabs	identification with being a doctor	the language of doctors, trimethyl-amine
Wordsworth	trauma on Salisbury Plain	identification with being a poet	the language of poets, the Salisbury Plain poems

Wordsworth's first response to his personal trauma is the composition of *Salisbury Plain*, whose characters are fiercely protected by the poet from the menace of the Real. Wordsworth's apparent need to more explicitly confess guilt relating to the abandonment of Annette Vallon would result in the revision known as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, with its crucial linguistic representation of the Real. Over the course of the Great Decade (and culminating in certain *Prelude* passages), Wordsworth is compelled to return to the vicinity of his encounter with the Real (often, perhaps, by the perusal or recollection of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain)*, and the consequent anxiety is relieved by the writing of other poems, by the structuring of other Symbolic buttresses against the reawakening of his Salisbury Plain trauma. These defenses, as we shall see, take three distinct forms (trauma poetry, encounter poetry, and the egotistical sublime) as Wordsworth struggles for a model of the growth of his mind insulated from the destabilizing energy of the Real.

Before proceeding to a reading of the Salisbury Plain poems, a brief comment should be made about the irony implied in "representing" the Real in a text. Part of the reason Lacan calls the Real the impossible is that it cannot be comprehended through language. The Real is the location where language evaporates, the location that resists even being called a location. Freud's transcript of the Irma dream is of course nothing other than a chain of signifiers, and not less so when he describes looking down the patient's throat. There is obviously a vast (and in a Lacanian sense crucial) difference between the dream and the report of the dream. By the time Freud begins

writing, the Real is long since escaped, and the memory of it comes into language as something far less menacing: the ultimate horror of the anti-Symbolic becomes vaguely perplexing scabs. Rendered part of a narrative with a beginning, middle and end, what we might call the no-longer-Real loses much of its capacity to traumatize. (Incidentally, this provides a plausible Lacanian explanation for why Freud, in the narrative of the dream, does not in looking down Irma's throat *seem* to display the anxiety we would typically associate with the Real. Wordsworth will use the same distancing properties of language to create a particularly nonthreatening version of the sublime at the Simplon Pass and elsewhere.)

The point here is that the encounter with the traumatic Real will always be outside the text, in a dream of 1895 or an experience of 1793, and thus beyond the reach of our interpretation. This is true of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, and is equally true of the other poems I will discuss. I am well aware that this leaves me open to the sort of attack often levied against the works of New Historicism, simply substituting "the Real" for "history": if the Real does not find an explicit place in the work, how can we with any certainty identify it as the source of the work, any more than we can any number of other possible sources? Even though the Real is radically beyond Wordsworth's language, I will argue that it shapes the contours of that language; Lacan's reading of the dream of Irma's injection shows that it is possible to find traces of the Real in language. The elucidation of such traces will be the primary accomplishment of my reading of the Salisbury Plain poems. Beyond this chapter, the menace of the Real is the impetus for the gradual development of Wordsworth's poetry over the Great Decade, and showing this evolution will substantiate its origin in that which language does not reach. The more planets in Wordsworth's system analyzed, I believe, the more obvious the gravitational pull of the impossible Real becomes.

On the Use of the Cornell Wordsworth[5]

Adventures on Salisbury Plain, my key text for understanding the impact of the Real on Wordsworth's work, became widely available only in 1975, published in *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, the first volume in the Cornell Wordsworth series. The purpose of the Cornell Wordsworth is to publish multiple manuscript versions of Wordsworth's poetry, with a view to showing the poet's extensive revision of his works, a process that with many poems covered decades. The formerly standard Oxford edition, published from 1940 to 1949 and edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, follows the principle of printing the poems in their final—and often, many would argue, inferior—versions as published by Wordsworth himself. Alternate texts have been an important issue in Wordsworth studies at least since de Selincourt's recovery of the 1805 *Prelude* in the 1920s; but the Cornell project is the first to offer multiple drafts of the entire canon. I argue that the poet's compulsion to repeat is a crucial factor in organizing his body of work, and that a number of poems written over a number of years may be seen as repressive rewritings of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*; as the Cornell Wordsworth makes clear, within this larger framework of repetition the poet was compelled to rework individual poems, often producing multiple complete manuscripts over many years. The so-called Salisbury Plain poems provide a typical example.

The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth, edited by Stephen Gill, includes three versions—representing three stages of composition—of a poem written in the Spenserian stanza: *Salisbury Plain, Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and *Guilt and Sorrow. Salisbury Plain* is the earliest version, and was composed in 1793 and 1794, in the immediate aftermath of Wordsworth's own traumatic Salisbury Plain experience. It shows a political commitment absent in the later versions, and focuses primarily on the sufferings of a dispossessed woman generally referred to as the Female Vagrant (following the title of an extract of the poem published in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*). The Female Vagrant, a soldier's widow, has a traveling companion, but he

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[5] My discussion of the Cornell project in this section is indebted to James A. Butler's "The Cornell Wordsworth Series."

is so lightly sketched in this first version that we do not learn anything about his history, and he fails to become a sublime figure in a Lacanian sense. Of this first Salisbury Plain poem Wordsworth remarked (in a letter from 1794 (1: 120)) that he would only consider publication for the purpose of making money.

Sometime in 1795 (the same year he met Coleridge), Wordsworth began work on the revision that would come to be known as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. He would continue to tinker with this version of the poem until 1799, but the important additions to the plot of *Salisbury Plain* had been made within a few months; in a letter to Francis Wrangham dated Nov. 20, 1795, Wordsworth noted that the changes that had been made were so extensive "that it may be looked on almost as another work" (1: 159). The Female Vagrant's story remains more or less intact, but the one-dimensional "traveler" of *Salisbury Plain* becomes a fully realized character (indeed the main character in the work), a Sailor driven by want and despair to commit a horrible crime, and driven by the Real sublime to a recognition of its devastating implications for his Symbolic self—in effect of the death of that self.

Guilt and Sorrow is the final version of the poem, prepared for publication by Wordsworth in 1841. The differences between *Guilt and Sorrow* and *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* are relatively minor, and they are all in the favor of the earlier draft. *Guilt and Sorrow* will be of little concern to us, except as an indicator of how difficult it was for Wordsworth to transform the Salisbury Plain poetry into something nonthreatening enough to publish.

The Salisbury Plain poems are of tremendous interest to any student of Wordsworth, composed as they were during the period of his most profound poetic evolution. Anyone reading *Salisbury Plain* and *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* in sequence will notice that the overtly political rhetoric of the earlier poem has disappeared in the revision, to be replaced by a fuller examination of psychological reactions to oppression (especially with regard to the Sailor). Though it discusses injustices suffered by individuals at the hands of government, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is not a political poem in the sense that its predecessor was. The differences between these two versions of the poem suggest the ways Wordsworth's attitude to politics—or at least to its representation in his verse—changes during the mid-1790s; indeed,

in many respects *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* might be regarded as the beginning of the Great Decade. As Stephen Gill notes in the introduction to his edition of the Salisbury Plain poems (in a statement Jerome McGann would surely see as composed under the influence of Romantic Ideology): "The presentation of human feelings through fully realized dramatic situations [in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*] demonstrated early in Wordsworth's career that his theme was indeed the mind of man and that his was a major, original genius" (13). Depending on one's critical viewpoint, the second Salisbury Plain poem might be either a step toward maturity (the discovery of the proper subject matter), or as the beginning of the repression of history in response to revolutionary disillusionment. I will agree with Gill that *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* represents a kind of step forward, but one that was immediately regretted and continually repented.

Salisbury Plain: Storytelling as Defense Against the Real

> ...I passed a couple of days rambling about Salisbury Plain, the solitude and solemnities of which prompted me to write a Poem of some length in the Spenserian Stanza. I have it still in Mss and parts may perhaps be thought worth publishing after my death among the 'juvenilia'. Overcome with heat and fatigue I took my Siesta among the Pillars of Stonehenge; but was not visited by the Muse in my Slumbers.
>
> -letter to John Kenyon, Summer 1838 (6: 616)

If, as a number of critics have argued, the traveler (later the Sailor) of *Salisbury Plain* represents Wordsworth, it is curious to note that the fictional persona of the poet never makes it to Stonehenge. I have suggested that in journeying across Sarum Wordsworth had a traumatic encounter with the Real, and that the Salisbury Plain poems were written in response to this experience. It would be intriguing to speculate that it was in the shadow of Stonehenge that this primal event occurred, that Wordsworth dreamed his own version of the Irma dream at this vestige of prehistory. While it is not necessary to pinpoint

the location of the wellspring of Wordsworth's poetry (and his claim of not having been visited by the Muse may perhaps be taken at face value), Stonehenge does in fact provide a reasonable version of the Real, as can be seen in the text of *Salisbury Plain*.

Often the Real is embodied in a personal trauma—as it is for Wordsworth—but inanimate objects can hold the same position beyond our field of language. One need only consider Stonehenge—not in its cultural context, not even as the word "Stonehenge," but rather in its brute simplicity, giant and mysterious stones arranged by an unseen hand. I refer here to Stonehenge as it must have first presented itself to the latter-day Christian culture to which Wordsworth belongs. In the wake of this original encounter, of course, the stones Wordsworth visited as a young man had become surrounded by a particularly thick cluster of Symbolic associations, as the later Britons strove to give various meanings to the silent Real. It does not require an especially creative reading of this phenomenon to find the anxiety of the Irma's injection dream behind the mythmaking associated with Stonehenge.

As I noted, the unnamed traveler of Salisbury Plain does not reach the Real stones of Stonehenge, and it is precisely the Symbolic legend of the place (as interpreted by the poet) that prevents this potentially traumatic encounter from taking place. At a distance, in a gathering evening storm, the traveler sees the place, which

> seems an antique castle spreading wide.
> Hoary and naked are its walls and raise
> Their brow sublime. (78-80)

As he tries to approach nearer, he hears a voice (disembodied, significantly, reminiscent of the free-floating formula for trimethylamine):

> "Oh from that mountain-pile avert thy face
> Whate'er betide at this tremendous hour.
> To hell's most cursed sprites the baleful place
> Belongs, upreared by their magic power.
> Though mixed with flame rush down the crazing shower
> And o'er thy naked bed the thunder roll
> Fly ere the fiends their prey unwares devour

Or grinning, on thy endless tortures scowl
Till very madness seem a mercy to thy soul.

"For oft at dead of night, when dreadful fire
Reveals that powerful circle's reddening stones,
'Mid priests and spectres grim and idols dire,
Far heard the great flame utters human moans,
Then all is hushed: again the desert groans,
A dismal light its farthest bounds illumes,
While warrior spectres of gigantic bones,
Forth-issuing from a thousand rifled tombs,
Wheel on their fiery steeds amid the infernal glooms." (82-99)

Few reading these lines will lament the absence of the supernatural in Wordsworth's mature verse, but they seem to serve the purpose of turning the traveler aside from the ancient stones. However, this character's reaction (or the lack thereof) is telling:

The voice was from beneath but face or form
He saw not, mocked as by a hideous dream.
Three hours he wildered... (100-02)

Though the traveler is "mocked" by the words, the trauma we might conventionally associate with a disembodied voice promising hellish terrors is absent. His emotional reaction (if any) to the voice is left out of the poem's narration, and we are left to wonder; certainly he does not appear to be devastated.

While we might wonder about the precise psychological impact the voice has on the traveler, for my purposes it is notable as an instance of the Symbolic preventing access to the Real: the legend of Stonehenge (as represented by the disembodied voice) keeps Wordsworth's character from reaching the actual location. But another way of saying this is that the Symbolic *protects* the traveler from the Real. The legends associated with Stonehenge are frightful, but they will not be borne out by an actual experience of the place. The supernatural is used by Wordsworth in *Salisbury Plain* as a threat which never materializes. In this first poem of Salisbury Plain, characters are consistently shielded from a possible experience of the Real by the

Symbolic, and the failure of this safeguard to function the same way in the later version—especially with regard to the more fully developed Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*—will be the primary difference between the two poems. A remarkable feature of *Salisbury Plain* is the amount of space (roughly half) devoted to the storytelling of its characters: in addition to the lengthy story the Female Vagrant tells about her past, there is the story she has been told about the "new murder'd corse" at the "dead house of the plain" (where she and the traveler meet), as well as the stories she has been told about the Druids. The common function of these stories—ostensibly troubling and/or frightening—is to keep the Real at bay, and their success may be especially seen in the calm with which the traveler receives the stories he is told. (His own lack of a history also contributes to his equanimity, as we shall see.) As stand-in for the poet who takes comfort in the writing of a poem about Salisbury Plain, the traveler welcomes the Symbolic, no matter the form it takes.

The primary story told in *Salisbury Plain*, the story underlying all the others—the tale told by the narrator—is the story of Oppression. (Wordsworth capitalizes many abstractions in the first Salisbury Plain poem, perhaps as a nod to the allegorization of the Spenserian stanza's namesake; in the final stanza alone we may find Truth, Oppressor, Pride, Reason, Error, and Superstition.) As critics have long noted, the narrator of *Salisbury Plain* takes an overtly political stance not to be found in later manuscripts of the poem. It is not necessary to belittle this poem's status as a serious social commentary on the abuses of the day, but from a psychological point of view, Oppression (especially in the telling of the Female Vagrant's history) serves as a Symbolic barrier against the Real. This structure is set up at the very outset of the poem, as the narrator contrasts present-day civilized society with that of the "savage." As miserable as the savage's life of constant danger is, there is the consolation that all in this primitive world suffer equally:

> Yet is he strong to suffer, and his mind
> *Encounters all his evils unsubdued;*
> For happier days since at the breast he pined
> He never knew, and when by foes pursued
> With life he scarce has reached the fortress rude,
> While with the war-song's peal the valleys shake,

What in those wild assemblies has he viewed
But men who all of his hard lot partake,
Repose in the same fear, to the same toil awake? (10-18)

In the civilized world there is rich and poor, and therefore happy and unhappy. The sorrows of the modern poor originate in considering the superior position of the upper classes, and in remembering those things that have been taken away by the privileged.

Though this poem can be (and should be) considered a serious commentary on the mistreatment of the poor, the characterization of the happy savage is an unconsciously accurate account of human experience irrespective of one's position in history: "For happier days since at the breast he pined / He never knew." From a Lacanian standpoint, this stanza reflects the universal desire for the infant's union with the mother, a union from which we are alienated in the Imaginary mirror stage, and from which we are still further alienated with the acquisition of Symbolic language. Regardless of the "practical" threats the savage is subjected to, the fall from infancy, first into Imaginary identification and later into language, is the greatest, the unavoidable danger; the words of the war-song are ultimately more troubling than the enemy who utters them. Describing such a life as lived only by the savage accomplishes a wish-fulfillment, turning a universal sorrow into a pain particular to a society to which an Englishman writing in 1793 does not belong. In place of an inevitable alienation through language—and, with it, the possibility of an encounter with the Real—the traveler across Sarum must contend with Oppression. While the clock can not be turned back on Symbolic alienation, the Oppressor can always be pulled down from the seat of power (hence the call to arms at the end of the poem). Despite the pain endured by the traveler and the Female Vagrant, there is an optimism to the story of Oppression, a sense that things can be changed for the better, and perhaps in short and revolutionary order. This optimism will be absent in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, a less political and more psychological poem. The truth, the menace of the Real behind the story of Oppression, is a much less positive tale.

The only concrete story of Oppression in *Salisbury Plain* is the Female Vagrant's history, told to the traveler to pass the time at the dead house of the plain. This account may be summarized as follows:

The Female Vagrant passes a happy childhood with her father (her mother having died in childbirth). At the age of eighteen, all of her father's property is seized ("Oppression" is invoked as the cause, but the description is completely nonspecific), and the two become homeless. They travel to another town, where the young woman's fiancé has gone for work. The two are married, and the father and daughter are given shelter. Four years are passed in relative happiness, and the Female Vagrant has three children. Her father dies just as the family starts to have trouble providing for itself. War is approaching (in a way the poetry leaves obscure, this is the cause of the family's financial hardship), and in order to feed his family the husband becomes a soldier, and his family follows him to the field of battle. (Though the language in question is again not specific, the conflict seems to be the American Revolution.) Within a year, husband and children are dead, victims of battle and fever. Returning to England, the widow becomes a wanderer, presumably for the remainder of her life.

Though the story of the Female Vagrant is perhaps reminiscent of actual experiences Wordsworth heard about, the woman's tale has important dissonances reflective of its powerful need to repress the Real. (And this is not surprising. The normal human response—the sane response—to the Real is repression.) The lamentation of her misery suggests the narrator's discussion of the lot of the savage:

> "Oh dreadful price of being! to resign
> All that is dear in being; better far
> In Want's most lonely cave to pine
> Unseen, unheard, unwatched by any star.
> Better before proud Fortune's sumptuous car
> Obvious our dying bodies to obtrude,
> Than dog-like wading at the heels of War
> Protract a cursed existence with the brood
> That lap, their very nourishment, their brother's blood." (307-15)

It is of course perfectly reasonable for the Female Vagrant to be devastated by her loss, but the focus on Oppression screens a more primal loss. In her story, as in the narrator's earlier discussion, it is suggested that primal unity of self can survive indefinitely, assuming it

is not taken away by the existing political structure. The woman's account of pre-Oppressed childhood will strike most readers (and not merely Lacanians) as impossibly happy:

> "Light was my sleep; my days in transport rolled:
> With thoughtless joy I stretched along the shore
> My parent's nets, or watched, when from the fold
> High o'er the cliffs I fed his fleecy store,
> A dizzy depth below! His boat and twinkling oar." (230-34)
>
> "The suns of eighteen summers danced along
> Joyous as in the pleasant morn of May." (253-54)

There is no suggestion of the alienation attendant upon initiation into the Symbolic order. While the Female Vagrant can obviously not be faulted for her lack of familiarity with latter-day psychological theory, most readers recalling their own childhoods, however pleasant, will feel that she protests too much. (A similar quality will be found in much of Wordsworth's later autobiographical poetry, which is often organized by screen memories.) In any case, the notion of unbroken happiness until the age of eighteen is directly contradicted by the character's account of the pain she had felt at having to separate from her fiancé, an event that occurs *before* her father's eviction:

> "His father bid him to a distant town
> To ply remote from groves the artist's trade.
> What tears of bitter grief till then unknown,
> What tender vows our last sad kiss delayed!" (280-83)

In spite of the trauma associated with this necessary separation, the Female Vagrant is able to claim that the experience of Oppression brought pain and alienation into her world. One does not need to be overly disposed to a psychoanalytic reading to wonder what other feelings of loss are screened by social issues. (In my opinion, the temporary separation from the fiancé looks back in its "grief" to the mother the woman never met.) The story of Oppression transforms universal, inevitable loss into the caprices of a social structure that can and should be overthrown. Again, this can foster a heady and

unwarranted optimism: the Oppressor can be removed from the throne, of course, but we will always be ruled by the Symbolic order. The Female Vagrant's story shields her from the Real of our common loss. While a New Historicist might lament the absence of politics in Wordsworth's later verse, in *Salisbury Plain* the social serves to screen a more immediate and personal trauma.

Of the various stories told in *Salisbury Plain,* the one that has received the most critical attention in recent years is that of the Druids, told to the Female Vagrant by an old man she encounters on the plain. The characterization of the mythical builders of Stonehenge shows an interesting mixture of barbarity and civilization:

> And oft a night-fire mounting to the clouds
> Reveals the desert and with dismal red
> Clothes the black bodies of encircling crowds.
> It is the sacrificial altar fed
> With living men. How deep it groans—the dead
> Thrilled in their yawning tombs their helms uprear;
> The sword that slept beneath the warrior's head
> Thunders in fiery air: red arms appear
> Uplifted thro' the gloom and shake the rattling spear.
>
> Not thus where clear moons spread their pleasing light.
> —Long bearded forms with wands uplifted shew
> To vast assemblies, while each breath of night
> Is hushed, the living fires that bright and slow
> Rounding th'aetherial field in order go.
> Then as they trace with awe their various files
> All figured on the mystic plain below,
> Still prelude of sweet sounds the moon beguiles
> And charmed for many a league the hoary desart smiles.
> (181-98)

The image of the Druids in *Salisbury Plain* is a blend of cruelty and enlightenment. In the wake of New Historicism, critics have tended to see the story of the Druids as reflecting political issues current in the 1790s. Samuel E. Schulman, focusing on the imagery of human sacrifice, finds an intentional parallel between ancient and modern governments.

In such a reading, the above-quoted passage may be seen as a conscious and pragmatic move on Wordsworth's part, an indirect critique of the government at a time when a direct one would be ill-advised. According to Schulman, another element of this critique is to be found in Wordsworth's use of both the venerable Spenserian stanza and a somewhat anachronistic language reminiscent of *The Faerie Queene*: "The archaic cast of the poem's language and syntax exerts a continuous pressure on the reader to look backward in time, to make the connection between ancient religious and modern political kinds of tyranny" (226). In Ann Janowitz's reading, the depiction of the Druids as having both positive and negative qualities is a reflection of the poet's own terribly conflicted feelings about the political order of the day. For Paul D. Sheats (*Making of Wordsworth's Poetry*), the ambiguous characterization of the Druids shows ambivalence about the French Revolution, a hopeful event which was inaugurated by enlightened individuals, only to devolve into senseless violence.

Alan Liu has provided the most formidable reading of the Druid passage in recent years. He sees these verses as an originary foreclosure of history. A political anxiety on Wordsworth's part is relieved by identifying present-day France as an ancient British society of which only ruins remain:

> Not in an incidental or peripheral way but in a manner that makes it the overwhelming anagogy of the poem, time triumphs over history. Nature buries all history within a remote prehistory of ruins on the Plain, deflects the past into a purified reality, and so at last allows him to emerge upon a scene of time become a self-sufficient ideology of justice. (*Sense of History* 199)

Taking the same cue I take from Book XII of *The Prelude*, Liu sees this as setting the stage for the remainder of Wordsworth's career: "Here he receives his poetic commandment. The commandment is a 'No' to history whose ultimate decree is time" (200). Upon hearing this commandment, so the New Historicist reading goes, it becomes inevitable that the poet's later work will be governed by Romantic Ideology.

In my reading, as with the other tales told in *Salisbury Plain*, the story of the Druids—regardless of any conscious or unconscious political motivation it might have—serves the function of keeping the Real at a safe distance. At those moments when they are talking rather than acting, Wordsworth's characters are safe from an encounter with the Real, if not necessarily from anything else. The Female Vagrant tells the traveler the Druid story as they pass time at the dead house of the plain. This story has obvious resonances with the warning the traveler hears as he approaches Stonehenge. Both stories are frightening, but remain finally stories, Symbolic: the traveler does not reach the ruins to see if the voice has spoken the truth, and neither character is going to meet a Druid. The Symbolic can be—and often is—disturbing, but as long as the characters in *Salisbury Plain* cling to the chain of signifiers there is the possibility of avoiding the underlying trauma of the Real.

In the case of the traveler, this is aided and abetted by his anonymity. The experience of the Real as trauma is potential for any human being; in a fictional work like *Salisbury Plain* the characters must be reasonable facsimiles of real people to be susceptible of the Real. Most importantly, the character must have his or her own personal history, a *life* to which the Real can be a threat. In the case of the Female Vagrant, the character's history is extraordinarily well-developed. We can imagine her having any number of experiences in the poem that would bring her to the vicinity of her past pain, and thus potentially to an encounter with the Real: she takes a trip to the coast, and the salt air returns her to the site of her loss, for example. Even a story might have this effect, as stories told in therapy often do. It happens that the stories she hears and the experiences she has in *Salisbury Plain* do not trigger such a Real moment, but this is due to narrative arrangement rather than anything in her psychology.

With the traveler, based on himself, Wordsworth is taking no chances. While for the Female Vagrant an encounter with the Real coincidentally does not happen, for the traveler it is not possible, for the simple reason that he is a man without a history. One of the most remarkable qualities of this character (and emphatically not to be repeated in the revised Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*) is the lack of an emotional reaction to his experiences. He is not (seemingly) frightened by a disembodied voice, and the Female Vagrant's story—though it does elicit his pity—does not apparently remind him of his

own pain. Reacting to his own experience of the Real on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth creates a fictional version of himself that is so constituted (or not constituted) that it is incapable of being overwhelmed by the Real sublime. The traveler is like the Female Vagrant dispossessed, and presumably would have his own sad story to tell, but in contrast to his companion's tale (long enough to be published as a separate poem in *Lyrical Ballads*) his travails are summarized in a single nonspecific Alexandrine: "He too had withered young in sorrow's deadly blight" (405). Such vagueness keeps the traveler out of danger: *something* happened, but "something" is too vague to find a correlative in the events of *Salisbury Plain*. As a first buttress against the poet's own Real, this work achieves a kind of success, but Wordsworth's compulsion to repeat—and his need to confess what he evidently considered a crime—would demand a revision, with far-reaching consequences for his body of work.

Adventures on Salisbury Plain: The Traumatic Kernel of Wordsworth's Poetry

We have relatively little biographical information regarding Wordsworth's decision to revise *Salisbury Plain*. In a letter to Francis Wrangham from November 20, 1795, he notes of the second version, then a work in progress: "Its object is partly to expose the vices of the penal law and the calamities of war as they affect individuals" (1: 159). This statement is consonant with the critical commonplace that *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* was written under the influence of Godwin's *Political Justice*, with its suggestion that a corrupt society can turn otherwise good individuals to a life of crime. The primary change to the plot of *Salisbury Plain*—and this goes hand in hand with the Godwinian critique—is the transformation of the one-dimensional traveler of the first poem into the fully realized Sailor of the second. In addition to the acquisition of a new political theory, I believe the primary impetus for a wholesale revision of the first version must have been a dissatisfaction with the character (or lack thereof) of the traveler. Commenting on the first version, Wordsworth had written William Mathews: "You inquired after the name of one of my poetical bantlings, children of this species ought to be named after their characters, and

here I am at a loss, as my offspring seems to have no character at all" (1: 136). In a work partly autobiographical, it must have been a nagging displeasure to have the character based on Wordsworth himself so lightly sketched. As we shall see, the character must have a stronger resemblance to the poet to serve as a mouthpiece for his confession. In any case, giving the traveler of the first version a personal history—in some respects similar to Wordsworth's own—brings the poet to the vicinity of his own trauma in a way that *Salisbury Plain* cannot. Wordsworth is compelled to respond with the all-important gibbet scene that will haunt so much of his later poetry. Without this representation of the Real, the course of Wordsworth's poetic development would have been radically different.

The Sailor's history prior to the time of the poem may be summarized briefly. Having served two years aboard a ship, he is excitedly returning to his family when he is press-ganged (kidnapped, essentially) and forced to serve in the war (as with the Female Vagrant's story, we might logically assume this to be the Revolutionary War). His period of service is not made specific—the narrator says simply "for years"—but when he is finally allowed to return to his native soil the "slaves of Office" refuse to give him the pay he has earned. Unable to provide for his family, the desperate man in his own neighborhood robs and murders a man (interestingly described as a "traveller"), and then becomes a wanderer (the likely prototype for Coleridge's Ancient Mariner), miserably trying to avoid the consequences of his crime.

The Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is a good man who does a terrible thing. Philosophically the influence of Godwin is very strong here, and it is not an exaggeration to say that the poem in its existing form could not have been written without a reading of *Political Justice*. Godwin is at pains to describe the ways in which society can drive kind and loving people to desperate acts (this is also the theme of his novel *Caleb Williams*). One of the remarkable—and some might say unrealistic—things about the Sailor's murderous act is the clear implication that it is the only serious transgression of which he has ever been guilty. Not only was he a good and loving husband before the crime, but the events of the poem make it clear that in its aftermath he is still a kind and considerate human being.

Adventures on Salisbury Plain is thus a social critique like its predecessor (less trenchant though perhaps more profound), but a reader with a psychoanalytic bent might wonder why Wordsworth would use a character based on himself as an illustration of the Godwinian parable. Anyone feeling guilty might take comfort in the notion that good people can be driven to bad acts. But what might Wordsworth have been feeling guilty about in the mid-1790s? Readers of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* have given this question its due attention. Both Paul D. Sheats and Michael H. Friedman find in the Sailor's story a tremendous anguish over Wordsworth's forced abandonment of Annette Vallon and their unborn child (whom the poet would not meet until 1802). The parallel is striking, down to the fact that it was partially finances that drove Wordsworth back to England. To the specifics of Sheats' and Freidman's readings I might also add that in leaving France the poet could be described (very briefly, of course) as a "sailor." We might speculate on the exact nature of Wordsworth's tormented feelings, but it will be obvious that the Godwinian model allows simultaneous confession and absolution. As Friedman notes:

> By having such a gentle, good man represent the guilty aspect of himself, Wordsworth makes it possible for the reader to see the efforts of his unconscious mind to justify himself and minimize his guilt. From this perspective, the character of the sailor is a compromise formation in which Wordsworth's opposing impulses find expression. On the one hand, the part of Wordsworth that wants to be punished for its transgressions seems to identify with a murderer and a thief who is hanged for his crimes. On the other hand, part of Wordsworth seems to repudiate any guilt. This part of him finds expression in the sympathetic sailor who, despite a momentary lapse, is loving and pure. (113)

The point of structuring his character in such a way is that it allows for the purging of painful feelings associated with Annette. As Sheats puts it: "The psychological function of the poem, like a dream, would appear to be therapeutic: it permits the dramatization and the vicarious

expiation of an act that is never named" (*Making of Wordsworth's Poetry* 114). In such a reading (and I hope this does not do too much violence to the work of these critics) we have the traditional Freudian notion of art as wish-fulfillment.

I believe it is possible for such an interpretation to be consistent with a Lacanian one, though it goes without saying that from my perspective Wordsworth would be horribly and repeatedly unsatisfied with the results of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* and that the character of the Sailor is more wishful thinking than wish-fulfillment. I have suggested that there is a trauma, intensely personal for Wordsworth, that is played out in the Sailor's gibbet scene, where the character confronts his Real. Taking my cue from these psychoanalytic readings of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*—and this notion will be bolstered by my readings of other poems in later chapters—I postulate that the Real organizing the poetry of the Great Decade becomes associated in Wordsworth's mind with the traumatic relationship with Annette Vallon. Let us apply such a notion to the foregoing reading of the Sailor. We can imagine the poet's extraordinary guilt at abandoning Annette, as well as the thought of the child he has never met, a toddler during the composition of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain.* The as yet unborn child that Wordsworth left behind can provide us with a powerful suggestion of the Real in this relationship, serving the same biological function as Irma's scabs: this is the mysterious, pulsing, preSymbolic life force, the unseen second heartbeat, the primal chaos that will eventually find form as a human being.

In this context, it becomes fairly easy to see how Wordsworth might come to associate Annette Vallon with his traumatic experience on Salisbury Plain in 1793. Wordsworth's first response to his Real trauma is to flee to the Symbolic comforts of poetry through the composition of *Salisbury Plain,* with its many story-based defenses against the Real. At some point Wordsworth becomes dissatisfied with the sketchy character of the traveler, and determines to rewrite the poem as something much more personal. It is only in such a revision, with a fully detailed Wordsworth-figure, that the guilty poet can find the absolution discussed by Friedman and Sheats. In some measure, perhaps, this is achieved by the poem, but this is of course a double-edged sword: a three-dimensional character with a history can confess and be forgiven, but is also potentially at the mercy of the Real. In

writing his Godwinian fictionalized autobiography, Wordsworth is too faithful to his own experience, and his personal Real is transmuted into the Sailor's gibbet scene, which will cast a long shadow over his later poetry.

The gibbet scene occurs early in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, soon after the description of the Sailor's personal history and crime:

> The proud man might relent and weep to find
> That now, in this wild waste, so keen a pang
> Could pierce a heart to life's best ends inclined.
> For as he plodded on, with sudden clang
> A sound of chains along the desart rang:
> He looked, and saw on a bare gibbet nigh
> A human body that in irons swang,
> Uplifted by the tempest sweeping by,
> And hovering round it often did a raven fly.
>
> It was a spectacle which none might view
> In spot so savage but with shuddering pain
> Nor only did for him at once renew
> All he had feared from man, but rouzed a train
> Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain.
> The stones, as if to sweep him from the day,
> Roll'd at his back along the living plain;
> He fell and without sense or motion lay,
> And when the trance was gone, feebly pursued his way. (109-26)

This experience of intense emotional trauma and recovery is what I have termed the Real sublime, and this is the only authentic expression of it to be found in Wordsworth's poetry. This instance of devastation, of being overwhelmed, is a sublime moment suggestive of the work of Kant and Burke, and completely unlike what will later be found in the benignant egotistical sublime. Physiologically, the symptom

experienced by the Sailor (as for the protagonist of the later trauma poem *Peter Bell*) is a trance.[6]

With a superficial reading, we might simply remark that the gibbeted body reminds the Sailor of the punishment that awaits, and that this is what occasions the trance. Such a reading is problematic for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the Sailor is obviously already aware of his future punishment; if this were not the case, he would not be wandering across Salisbury Plain trying to avoid the authorities. More important is the clear distinction the narrator makes: not only does the sight of the dead man bring to mind the Sailor's own possible gibbeting, but also "rouzed a train / Of the mind's phantoms." The narrator gives no explanation of what the mind's phantoms are, but they are explicitly described as being distinct from external punishment. My belief is that "mind's phantoms" is Wordsworth's makeshift term for the Real. "Makeshift" is perhaps putting it mildly: the Real always occurs beyond the reach of language, but in transforming his own experiences into those of the Sailor Wordsworth must call it *something*.

It will perhaps be curious to the reader that the meaning of "mind's phantoms" is not elaborated in the poem, as if this were a commonplace term. Perhaps it is in the very ambiguity of the phrase that it provides a reasonable equivalent for the Real, if there is such a thing. *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is of course a chain of signifiers like any other, but "mind's phantoms" may perhaps be described as a knot in the chain, a point of blockage momentarily impeding the easy slippage from word to word characteristic of the Symbolic. While every response will be different, I think the typical effect of "mind's phantoms" is to make the reader *stop reading*; to pause in the narrative to ask the obvious question, What are the mind's phantoms? Wordsworth's failure to provide the reader with a definition or explanation lends the phrase a certain uncanniness. Such moments of Symbolic breakdown are typically associated with the Real. In the context of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* "mind's phantoms" in its

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[6] An interesting and detailed discussion of Wordsworthian trances—though not one with a direct bearing on my work—may be found in John Beer's article "Coleridge, the Wordsworths, and the State of Trance."

inscrutability perhaps provides as close to an equivalent for the Real as we are likely to find in language.

If the mind's phantoms are indeed a name for the Real, the question becomes, What is it about the gibbeted figure that occasions transcendence for the Sailor? Quite beyond being a corpse, the dead body provides a very specific function for Wordsworth's protagonist, as recourse to the work of Slavoj Žižek will show. In Žižek's reading of Lacan, a sublime figure is one "between the two deaths," one for whom there has been a disjunction between Symbolic and literal (or Real) death. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, his first book, he provides two examples: the ghost of Hamlet's father, physically dead but Symbolically still living, with a debt to be settled, hence his return as a "frightful apparition" (135); and Antigone toward the conclusion of Sophocles' play, physically still alive yet Symbolically dead, condemned, and therefore the embodiment of "sublime beauty" (135). The Sailor is a sublime figure in the sense that Antigone is, physically still alive but Symbolically a dead man, cut off from all comforts of organized society, with no family or friends.

But Antigone's sublimity is associated with her powerful speeches in the face of her fate, in the composure with which she addresses her impending demise. Calm in the face of an unavoidable destiny, hers is a voice from beyond the grave as surely as is that of Hamlet's father. Wordsworth's Sailor is certainly very different from Sophocles' heroine. To put the matter at the level of plot, Antigone does not try to escape Thebes. The strength of this character's rhetoric lies in her acceptance of her destiny, her choice to *become* a sublime figure. Typically of a poet for whom psychological processes would always fascinate, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is about a character *learning* that he is a sublime figure, and this realization is triggered by the gibbet scene. The symptom of this recognition, again, is a trance. In the dead body, as critics have observed (and as the conclusion of the poem bears out), the Sailor sees his own future self. In Lacanian terms, he makes an Imaginary identification with the corpse. As a *future* self, however, the corpse shows an important difference from the Sailor: the gibbeted body is dead in both a Symbolic and a literal sense. In the encounter with this apparition, the Sailor is thrown back violently upon the difference between himself and the dead man: his brute biological life, capable of transcending even something as quintessentially

"human" as the Symbolic—the Real. Finding the equivalent of Irma's scabs within himself, he comes to realize (not immediately, but certainly by the end of the poem) that this is all he has left, that he is a dead man walking the earth. This encounter with the Real is what was missing in *Salisbury Plain*, and it will not be articulated again in Wordsworth's work, although its later "absence" will insist on particular structures in much of his most important poetry.

With respect to the tensions between Lacan's three registers of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real, it will perhaps be obvious that the Sailor's gibbet scene is very different from the dream of Irma's injection, and from Wordsworth's own traumatic experience as I have described it. For Freud and for Wordsworth, the experience of the Real is what might be described as "normal" or typical for a human being, a trauma from which one recovers through the intervention of the Imaginary and Symbolic:

Real →	Imaginary →	Symbolic
Irma's scabs, trauma on Salisbury Plain	identification with being a doctor/poet	trimethyl-amine, the Salisbury Plain poems

For Wordsworth's Sailor, conversely, the Imaginary identification is the first step, and it is his recognition that he is unable to take the next step to the Symbolic—that in effect he no longer has a Symbolic self—that brings him to the uncanny realm of the Real, to the traumatic recognition that he is a sublime figure:

Imaginary →	(Symbolic) →	Real
identification with gibbeted criminal	discovery that Symbolic self is dead	recognition of sublimity

What is momentary and horribly uncanny for Freud and Wordsworth—the Real—is the substance of the sublime Sailor's daily existence. Another way of saying this is simply that sublime figures like the Sailor and Antigone are literary characters, confronted with extreme psychic stresses, perhaps not often duplicated in the real

world. In considering the difference between Wordsworth and his Sailor, it might here again be useful to consider the notion that *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is a wish-fulfillment. I have suggested that for Wordsworth the experience of the Real is intimately bound up with the poet's conflicted feelings about the relationship with Annette Vallon, and that the story of the Sailor provides him with a way of confessing his guilty feelings. And yet as a confession it is vague and indirect enough—as are such other sideways glances at Annette as the Vaudracour and Julia episode from *The Prelude*—that Wordsworth's French family remained a secret until the twentieth century. Encounters with the Real bring with them at least the possibility of a Symbolic recovery in which the self is changed for the better. (Clearly this is the implication of Lacan's reading of Freud's Irma dream.) The Sailor's horrible encounter with the gibbeted criminal transforms him from a pathetic wanderer into a man fully willing and able to accept the consequences of his actions. Perhaps in this sense Wordsworth's sublime Sailor embodies not the poet's confession but rather the confession he wishes he were able to make. As the remainder of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* makes clear, the Sailor's response is both more heroic and less typical than what we would expect from a normal, nonsublime person.

From the point of view of the Sailor, the gibbet scene, early in the poem, is the important encounter; his later experiences in the poem will serve merely as reminders of what the dead man has to teach him, for the most part gentle nudges toward his own gibbet after a first violent push. The Sailor's encounter with the ancient pillars of Stonehenge is typical. As Enid Welsford notes: "After the swoon beneath the gibbet, the Sailor's first sight of the prehistoric ruins comes as something of an anti-climax" (28). An important difference from *Salisbury Plain* reveals itself at Stonehenge. The disembodied voice warning the traveler not to approach is absent. (The Sailor does not in fact reach the ruins, but this is because the thunderstorm is more violent immediately above them, forcing him to shy away.) Continuing the notion of Stonehenge as the Real, the lack of a supernatural voice is significant, and emblematic of the changes Wordsworth made to the first version of the poem: in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* language does not serve to protect characters from the Real. On the contrary, the Female Vagrant's story (largely unchanged from *Salisbury Plain*, though somewhat extended)

causes the Sailor to experience a repetition of the trance from the gibbet scene.

This second trance actually occurs in the middle of the woman's story. She and the Sailor are in the dead house of the plain, shielded from the elements, and she reaches the point in her narrative where she loses husband and children:

> "The pains and plagues that on our heads came down,
> Disease and famine, agony and fear,
> In wood or wilderness, in camp or town,
> It would thy brain unsettle even to hear.
> All perished—all, in one remorseless year,
> Husband and children! one by one, by sword
> And ravenous plague, all perished: every tear
> Dried up, despairing, desolate, on board
> A British ship I waked, as from a trance restored."
>
> She paused—or by excess of grief oppress'd,
> Or that some sign of mortal anguish broke
> In strong convulsion from her comrade's breast—
> She paused and shivering wrapp'd her in her cloak
> Once more a horrid trance his limbs did lock.
> Him through the gloom she could not then discern
> And after a short while again she spoke;
> But he was stretch'd upon the wither'd fern,
> Nor to her friendly summons answer could return. (388-405)

Why is the Female Vagrant's story, which does not affect the anonymous traveler of *Salisbury Plain*, so traumatic for the Sailor? There are some broad parallels to his story, of course. Her time aboard a ship might suggest his own travails as a mariner, and her tale is like his about losing a family. These details in my opinion occasion an Imaginary identification with the woman's pain. As the gibbet scene has shown us, this sort of identification already puts the Sailor in a dangerous place, on the verge of being reminded again of his Symbolic death, which is surely accomplished when he sees in the Female Vagrant with whom he identifies a hopeless, lifeless wanderer. And then there is her coincidental use of the word "trance," eerily

suggesting his own recent suffering at the gibbet, and making clear that words, the currency of the Symbolic, are no longer of any help to him. In fact, given the arrangement of the narrative, it may even be the word "trance" itself that leads to the Sailor's second collapse. The narrator does not tell us specifically what causes the new trance (simply that it is happening "once more"), but this is not very important. The fact is that any number of elements of her story *might* be the cause of the Sailor's trance, because he has a personal history for which they can be relevant, a personality for which Imaginary identifications are possible. This is to be contrasted with the traveler of the earlier version, who has no history, no evident trauma impacting his personality, and who can thus hear the Female Vagrant's story (or any story) without a visceral and personal response. The traveler is always protected from the Real; conversely, after the gibbet encounter, the Real is always close at hand for the Sailor. Even a story—for most people a Symbolic means of avoiding or escaping the Real—will not help the Sailor, as it can serve only as a reminder of his own Symbolic death.

The recurrence of the Sailor's trance marks the end of Part I of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain.* (In *Peter Bell,* as we shall see, a trance also occurs at the conclusion of a section of the work.) The beginning of Part II, as the Sailor still lies senseless in the dead house, offers uncharacteristic recourse to the Gothic on the part of the narrator:

> Now dim and dreary was the Plain around;
> The ghosts were up on nightly roam intent;
> And many a gleam of grey light swept the ground
> Where high and low those ghostly wanderers went,
> And whereso'er their rustling course they bent
> The startled earth-worms to their holes did slink,
> The whilst the crimson moon, her lustre spent,
> With orb half-visible, was seen to sink
> Leading the storm's remains along the horizon brink.
>
> The Sailor now awoke and, on his side
> Upraised, inquir'd if she had nothing seen.
> And when the Maiden answered, "No," he cried,
> "'Tis well. I am a wretched man I ween.
> Your tale has moved me much and I have been

I know not where." (406-20)

The appearance of the supernatural at this point—not as a "story" told by a character but as an "event" occurring within the narrative reality of the poem as a whole—is puzzling. Karen Swann sees the episode as reflecting Wordsworth's ambivalence (at least in the mid-1790s) about the Gothic. Wordsworth is famous for leaving the supernatural tales of *Lyrical Ballads* to Coleridge, and of course *The Female Vagrant* was excerpted for the first edition. The story told by the soldier's widow is one of everyday events told in everyday language. As Swann points out, she has chosen not to tell the Sailor the very Gothic story she had heard about a "new-murder'd corse" discovered at the dead house. The Female Vagrant's reason for telling her own story rather than something more sensational, according to Swann, is to prevent upsetting the Sailor; but as the beginning of Part II shows, the ghosts come out anyway:

> This moment on Salisbury Plain, then, can be read as a preemptive strike at a popular account of Wordsworth's poetic development. The Female Vagrant's poetic innovations simply make no difference in terms of the effect she wants to avoid: no matter how much she tries to distance herself from it, that most crude and derivative of modes, the gothic, seems fated to repeat. (814)

As an analysis of Wordsworth's own mixed feelings about the use of the supernatural in his poetry, Swann's reading is pertinent. As a reading of the intent and effect of the Female Vagrant's storytelling, however, it leaves much to be desired. We do not get the suggestion that the soldier's widow is trying to suppress the Gothic. The narrator simply remarks that she does not tell the story of the murder victim,

> And well it was, for surely once again
> *The fit had made his bones with horror quake:*
> She knew not what a hell such spot had power to wake. (250-52)

The woman does not tell the story of the murder, but this is not due to any concern for the Sailor's possible response, which she has no way of

anticipating; it is merely a happy coincidence. But the Sailor does not need a tale of the supernatural to inspire terror, and it is in fact the perfectly mundane story of the Female Vagrant's suffering that provokes his second trance. The ghosts appear on the scene *after* his collapse, and they are presented not as appearing within his fevered brain like the mind's phantoms, but rather on the actual landscape of Salisbury Plain. There is in actuality no suggestion in the poetry that the Sailor is affected by the ghosts, or even sees them; and it is important to note that he is indoors, while the ghosts are presented as haunting the natural world outside. When the Sailor recovers and asks the Female Vagrant if she has seen anything, he is not necessarily (and in my opinion not likely) referring to the spirits. His trance is a powerful instance of the sublime, a repetition of the gibbet encounter, and as countless critics have noted, the sublime temporarily disrupts the subject's normal relationship to the external world. This moment of intense trauma, being Real, is beyond language, and, strictly speaking, indescribable for the Sailor. "I have been / I know not where" is as specific as the Sailor can be in describing his second trance, and does not ring true as a description of being menaced by ghosts; we have a word for "ghost," and Wordsworth's protagonist does not use it. (I might also point out that the Sailor specifically tells the soldier's widow that it was her *story* that "moved me much," and not a sense of being haunted.) In *Salisbury Plain*, the traveler is too lightly sketched—or not human enough—to be troubled by the disembodied voice of Stonehenge; in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, the Sailor has more practical worries that those associated with the Gothic.

But of course we circle back to the question, Why interrupt the course of the narrative with a ghost story? Swann may be right that *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* chronicles an anxiety on Wordsworth's part about the boundary between the natural and the supernatural. Nevertheless, it might be wise to consider this narrative move in the context of the Real. The paradox of an "account" of the Real (and we also noted this in the dream of Irma's injection) is that one is describing what cannot be described. Even the word "Real" is of course ultimately a metaphor. We may here profitably recall the gibbet scene. The Sailor is not only troubled by the thought of what the authorities will do to him when he is captured, but also by "a train / Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain." My theory, again, is that "mind's

phantoms" is a name for the Real. But I will be the first to acknowledge (as consistency with the theory demands) that this is not the only possible interpretation. The mind's phantoms, for example, could be the guilt the Sailor feels when reminded of his crime by the spectacle before him. It is the nature of the Real that it can not be named accurately within the poem; since any signifier for the Real must ultimately be an arbitrary one, we must allow for the possibility of other readings. (In the sense that the subject of inquiry can not find an explicit place in the work, this is much the same dilemma confronting New Historicism.)

But to raise a question omitted in my earlier discussion, why select "mind's phantoms" as the name of the Real, as opposed to some other phrase? It may not be pushing the interpretation beyond plausibility to argue that the use of the word "phantom" in itself invokes the Gothic. As a term for a menacing pseudo-human, "phantom" would have fit in very well with the Gothic warning of Stonehenge from *Salisbury Plain*, though there the words of choice are "sprite," "fiend" and "spectre." I believe that the experience of the Real sublime naturally lends itself to what might be called a Gothic interpretation on the part of the subject. Any experience of the Real has the potential of being frightening, and this of course is one of the intended effects of the Gothic. Among the theorists of the sublime, it is well to remember that in Burke's formulation anything which is "fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*" (36). I believe the use of the word "phantom" at the gibbet, as well as the ghost scene at the beginning of Part II, reflects an unconscious pressure on Wordsworth to find *some* name for the Real. The invoking of the language of the Gothic is as good a solution as any, and better than most, if only because the purpose of the Gothic is to terrify. Certainly an encounter with a ghost is the sort of thing we might expect to drive a character into a trance (though this is manifestly *not* what happens at the start of Part II of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*).

The Gothic or supernatural in *Salisbury Plain* protects characters from the Real; in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* it takes on the impossible burden of representing the Real. Like anything else linguistic, Gothic discourse is inadequate to the task of expressing the Real, and this

accounts for the dissonances to be found in its usage in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. Obviously a bare and unfamiliar phrase like "mind's phantoms" demands a further gloss by the narrator, and this we are not given, resulting in an irreducible ambiguity. The description of the ghosts is even more vexed. When the Sailor falls victim to his second trance, we might anticipate getting a glimpse of his unconscious torment, perhaps a description of the mind's phantoms. Rather than an internal haunting, we have ghosts sweeping the plain outside the dead house, and no indication that the Sailor is aware of them. Wordsworth is pressured to show the reader the Real his protagonist has again fallen prey to, and a frightening image of ghosts is his substitute for what cannot be represented. With the mind's phantoms, the sense that the terminology is inadequate to its task is reflected in the lack of narrative commentary on the term; with the ghosts, we *are* given a full description, but the same uneasiness can be seen in the narrator's not telling us that the Sailor ever sees the spirits. The Gothic is a reasonable solution to the problem of "describing" the Real, perhaps the least of a number of evils, but Wordsworth is rightly ambivalent about its use. Words will always falter at the brink of the Real, and the Sailor's own "I have been / I know not where" is the best commentary on either of his trances.

After the Sailor recovers from the second trance, the Female Vagrant resumes her story, and the remainder of the night passes without incident. (The ghosts do not make another appearance.) The following morning, the two have a chance encounter which reminds the Sailor of the crime he has committed. They come upon a couple with their child, and find that in a fit of rage for a momentary disobedience the father has been beating the boy. Looking at the father, the Sailor is reminded of his own past violence,

> And with firm voice and indignation high
> Such further deed in manhood's name forbad.
> He, confident in passion, made reply
> *With bitter insult and revilings sad,*
> Calling him vagabond, and knave, and mad,
> And ask'd what plunder he was hunting now;
> The gallows would one day of him be glad.
> Here cold sweat started from the sailor's brow,

Yet calm he seem'd, as thoughts so poignant would allow.

Nor answer made, but stroked the child, outstretch'd
His face to earth, and as the boy turn'd round
His batter'd head, a groan the Sailor fetch'd.
The head with streaming blood had dy'd the ground,
Flow'd from the spot where he that deadly wound
Had fix'd on him he murder'd. Through his brain
At once the griding iron passage found;
Deluge of tender thoughts then rush'd amain
Nor could his aged eyes from very tears abstain. (631-48)

The gibbet scene made vivid for the Sailor the punishment that awaited him when captured; here he is given a reminder of the crime itself. It is curious that Wordsworth would choose to parallel a desperate robbery and murder with an instance of child abuse. Karen Swann and David Collings see this scene as a confirmation of the Sailor's ultimately oedipal reasons for committing a crime: the kind of father-son tension exhibited here is the unconscious source of the Sailor's own previous aggression. This certainly is a possibility, but from the Sailor's conscious perspective the young victim's role in the family romance is far less important than the horrible coincidence of his wound's location, and his Imaginary identification with the father's violence.

It might be reasonable to expect this eerie moment of recognition to be the occasion for another collapse on the Sailor's part, but a third trance does not happen. One can only assume that the Sailor is beginning to come to terms with his Symbolic annihilation. Certainly, the father's mention of the gallows does not have the sting it would have had the previous day. The relative calm with which Wordsworth's protagonist responds to this threat is the beginning of the sublime beauty Žižek locates in the resignation of Antigone. Seeing the Sailor's tender reaction to the child's pain, the father is seized by guilt, and the family is reconciled. Before he and the Female Vagrant leave the family, he speaks to them, and the serenity of his language and demeanor is a reflection of his growing awareness of his sublimity:

"'Tis a bad world, and hard is the world's law;
Each prowls to strip his brother of his fleece;

Much need have ye that time more closely draw
The bond of nature, all unkindness cease,
And that among so few there still be peace:
Else can ye hope but with such num'rous foes
Your pains shall ever with your years increase."
While his pale lips these homely truths disclose,
A correspondent calm stole gently on his woes. (658-66)

This grand pronouncement on the state of human relations is something we would not have expected from the Sailor earlier in the poem, and is another indication of the change he has undergone. We should also pay close attention to his use of "ye" and "your": his own gibbet scene is yet to come, but he already speaks to the world from the perspective of an outsider. The violent father has the potential to change his ways, to become a better person. Like sublime Antigone, the Sailor is already dead, and is finally coming to a realization of this.

One more encounter awaits the Sailor before sentence is passed, and as a coincidence it makes the child's wound pale in comparison. After leaving the family, the companions share breakfast at an inn, and say their goodbyes. Leaving the inn, the Female Vagrant comes upon a dying woman. She returns to get help, and the sufferer is brought back to the inn, where the Sailor is dismayed to learn it is his own wife. He discovers that she has become poverty stricken in his absence, and that when the murder victim was found near their house, along with a report that the Sailor had been seen in the neighborhood, she and their children were driven from their home. This, the impact of his violence on his own family, is the one lesson left for the Sailor to learn. Just before his wife dies, he identifies himself to her and asks for her forgiveness. With her death, the cycle of his violence to others is completed, and "in his breast a dreadful quiet reign'd" (801).

At this point, the Sailor is completely prepared for the long-avoided judgment of society, and he does not waste time:

Confirm'd of purpose, fearless and prepared,
Not without pleasure, to the city strait
He went and all which he had done declar'd:
"And from your hands," he added, "now I wait,
Nor let them linger long, the murderer's fate."

Nor ineffectual was that piteous claim.
Blest be for once the stroke which ends, tho' late,
The pangs which from thy halls of terror came,
Thou who of Justice bear'st the violated name!

They left him hung on high in iron case,
And dissolute men, unthinking and untaught,
Planted their festive booths beneath his face;
And to that spot, which idle thousands sought,
Women and children were by fathers brought;
And now some kindred sufferer driven, perchance,
That way when into storm the sky is wrought,
Upon his swinging corpse his eye may glance
And drop, as he once dropp'd, in miserable trance. (811-28)

The image of the Sailor in the gibbet, causing another criminal to fall into a trance, may strike many readers as another extraordinary coincidence. In my Lacanian reading, however, this moment is implicit in the Sailor's original encounter with the dead body. If there is a moral to this story, it is, We cannot escape the Real. (Or, to quote one of Lacan's most famous formulations, the Real "is that which always comes back to the same place" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 49).) If the Sailor, in that first moment of violence against his victim, had known what he learned at the gibbet, he would never have tried to avoid his punishment, to protract a shell of an existence in which his Symbolic self had already been executed. One of the truly engaging things about this poem is that—Godwinian justification notwithstanding—Wordsworth does not allow the Sailor to escape the punishment he deserves. As a parable for human consciousness (criminal or otherwise), *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* tells us that the consequences of our actions are unavoidable, and that the traumatic Real that transforms the Sailor into a walking corpse will finally return to demand payment of its debt. Whether conscious or not, this is an extraordinary insight on Wordsworth's part, and one that is absolutely unique in his poetry. One need only look at the terrible revisions Wordsworth made to *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*'s conclusion for its eventual publication as *Guilt and Sorrow*:

Confirmed of purpose, fearlessly prepared
For act and suffering, to the city straight
He journeyed, and forthwith his crime declared:
"And from your doom," he added, "now I wait,
Nor let it linger long, the murderer's fate."
Not ineffectual was that piteous claim:
"O welcome sentence which will end though late,"
He said, "the pangs that to my conscience came
Out of that deed. My trust, Saviour! is in thy name!"

His fate was pitied. Him in iron case
(Reader, forgive the intolerable thought)
They hung not: —no one on *his* form or face
Could gaze, as on a show by idlers sought;
No kindred sufferer, to his death-place brought
By lawless curiosity or chance,
When into storm the evening sky is wrought,
Upon his swinging corse an eye can glance,
And drop, as he once dropped, in miserable trance. (649-66)

These lines are a powerful argument for the Cornell Wordsworth.

In 1838, five years before the publication of *Guilt and Sorrow*, Wordsworth had remarked that portions of the Salisbury Plain manuscripts might be published after his death as "juvenilia." The tone in the letter to John Kenyon (6: 616) suggests a forced dismissiveness: *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is an immature work, not worthy of the adult poet's attention, and perhaps never to be published. As the conclusion of *Guilt and Sorrow* shows, Wordsworth was in actuality disturbed enough by his early manuscript to revise it extensively, with unfortunate consequences for the quality of the poetry. Most notably, the Sailor in *Guilt and Sorrow* is not placed in a gibbet at the end of the poem. In fact, we are not told the circumstances of his demise, or even that he dies; instead we are simply informed that the conclusion of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is in error, that it does not happen *that way*—a curious move given that Wordsworth is clearly assuming a reader not familiar with the earlier versions of the poem. What had been a statement about the inescapable nature of the Real becomes something much more prosaic, a story of crime and punishment

viewed through the older Wordsworth's perspective of Christian redemption.

No matter what critical framework we bring to *Guilt and Sorrow*, we must be dissatisfied with the lack of resolution: what *does* happen to the Sailor, if not a gibbeting? Obviously, almost anything, which robs the poem of its tragic character: it is as if the play were to end with Creon on his way to liberate Antigone, her sublime fate still in doubt. Given the revised ending, the power of the Sailor's speech to the family of the abused child—the voice of the dead—sadly becomes so much pontification. Certainly we would not say *Guilt and Sorrow* has a happy ending, but this is because it has no ending at all. Telling us what does *not* happen to the Sailor shows obvious equivocation on Wordsworth's part. As Arnold Schmidt observes in a perceptive close reading of the final stanza:

> Wordsworth suspends the word 'not' as the gibbet suspends the Sailor's body. By delaying the 'not,' the reader first imagines the Sailor gibbeted, then not gibbeted, but the picture of his body hanging on public display remains an after-image burned into the mind's eye, faded but present. (168)

The reader for whom the thought of the gibbeted Sailor is intolerable is the older Wordsworth himself, but he is not able to evade its imagery. All the final Salisbury Plain poem shows us is that the Wordsworth of *Guilt and Sorrow* is no match for the Wordsworth of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. *Guilt and Sorrow* does not repay close attention, but several of the evasions of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* which were composed during the Great Decade are among the strongest poetry in the language.

2. The Egotistical Sublime in *Tintern Abbey*

Scene 1, 1793: A young poet comes to the Wye valley for the first time, is struck by the beauty of the natural scenery.

Scene 2, 1798: The poet, with a dear Friend, returns to the Wye, and composes a poem in blank verse, focusing on the ways the impressions of the previous visit have sustained him over the intervening five years.

Wordsworth again, of course, accompanied by his sister Dorothy in the second scene. *Tintern Abbey* is the first great poem of the egotistical sublime, which for Wordsworth (as the sublime typically is for eighteenth century theorists) is grounded, seemingly, in an experience of nature. As an account of the way Wordsworth's personality has evolved against the unchanging backdrop of the Wye's murmuring waters, *Tintern Abbey* becomes also the first poem on the growth of the poet's mind, the true genesis of *The Prelude*. The brevity of my paraphrase above is consistent with the mood of the poem, for its one hundred and sixty lines notwithstanding *Tintern Abbey* is finally a poem about what is *not* said, about what is excluded.

The explicit theme of *Tintern Abbey* is a meditation on the differences between Wordsworth's 1793 and 1798 selves. Upon the poet's second visit to the Wye Valley he discovers that he has changed radically. Much of the poem is a discussion of the tension between what has been lost (a primal bond with nature) and what gained (the possibility of metaphysical insight into the workings of the world). Though few poems have inspired the critical response that this work has, many of the most prominent readings of *Tintern Abbey* have focused on the poem's tension between loss and recovery. Unsurprisingly, these critics have often disagreed (with each other and with Wordsworth) about the substance of this tension. For many years M. H. Abrams dominated discussion of *Tintern Abbey* (and indeed of

Wordsworth's poetry in general). In Abrams' view Wordsworth loses his early political hopes and gains a greater understanding of his inner self. After the dark turn taken by the French Revolution, in this reading, Wordsworth becomes more introspective, as he leaves behind thoughts of social upheaval for an inner, spiritual revolution. According to Abrams (and, following his lead, an entire generation of scholars) the abandonment of politics is necessary to the full flowering of Wordsworth's poetic genius, and thus *Tintern Abbey* is typical of the Great Decade: a meditation on the mind's evolution against the constant backdrop of the Wye valley, depicting a relationship between Man and Nature in which the concerns of the larger social world do not have a proper place. Harold Bloom, a student of Abrams, has also wielded a powerful influence in Wordsworth studies. Bloom's analysis of *Tintern Abbey* is to be found in his landmark *Poetry and Repression*, published in 1976. Bloom sees *Tintern Abbey* as the prototype for "modern" poetry governed by the anxiety of influence. Bloom sees the memory of the 1793 visit to the Wye as a defense against the repressed struggle with the influence of John Milton. According to this interpretation Wordsworth loses a conscious understanding of the confrontation with Milton in order to gain a sense of himself as a vital and original poet. More recently the work of New Historicism has offered a powerful critique of the tension underlying *Tintern Abbey*. In the most prominent New Historicist reading, that of Marjorie Levinson, Wordsworth loses the possibility of an authentic encounter with the historical implications of the Wye Valley in 1798 in order to gain a sense of his oneness with Nature. I share with New Historicism a belief that an element left out of *Tintern Abbey* – more precisely repressed from it – is the key to the understanding of the work. While New Historicism sees history as the absence organizing the poem, I identify it instead as the Lacanian Real.

These readings (along with many others) have done much to enrich our understanding of *Tintern Abbey*, and I am in agreement with them in believing that an analysis of the loss/recovery dynamic at work in the poem is central to its interpretation. The primary difference of my perspective is that I contend that this dynamic must be analyzed in the context of the Salisbury Plain poems, and of Wordsworth's own encounter with the Real that lies behind them. This encounter occurred in the summer of 1793, immediately before the poet's first trip to the

Wye, and in my opinion the recollection of the river valley must be seen as a screen memory defending Wordsworth from the terrors he associated with Salisbury. From this perspective, the fact that Wordsworth interprets his two Wye visits in terms of loss and recovery is not surprising. The Real sublime is by its very nature a matter of loss and recovery: in its first phase the assault of the Real causes the subject to lose his/her connection to everyday reality, and in its second equilibrium is regained through the efficacy of the Symbolic (and, to a lesser extent, the Imaginary). As I discussed in my previous chapter, the Real sublime is very traumatic for the subject, a sudden *attack* from which one struggles to recover. In this respect, the Real sublime may be seen as broadly consistent with the traditional eighteenth century sublimes of Kant and Burke. In the repressive rewriting at work in *Tintern Abbey*, however, this intense moment becomes a much gentler, less oppressive tension between loss and recovery.

This may be seen by comparing Wordsworth's own reflections in *Tintern Abbey* with the experiences of the Sailor in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* (the Wordsworth-figure who experiences the Real sublime in that poem). The Sailor, a fugitive fearing the retribution of the authorities, comes upon a corpse swinging in a gibbet, and this leads to an experience of the Real sublime. This encounter is devastating for the Sailor, physically knocking him from his feet and into a trance, from which he slowly recovers. In *Tintern Abbey*, the loss as Wordsworth describes it is not devastating, nor is the recovery difficult. Indeed one of the crucial mysteries for Wordsworth to ponder in this work is the point at which loss and recovery occurred: only during the 1798 trip to the Wye does Wordsworth become aware that *at some point* in the past five years he has lost his innocence and gained the possibility of metaphysical insight. The devastating encounter with the Real in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* becomes a process so benign that Wordsworth did not notice it when it was happening. There are two specific reasons why Wordsworth's unconscious selects the first visit to the Wye valley as his defense against the energy of the Real sublime: (1) as I have already indicated, because it occurred immediately after his own traumatic encounter; and (2) because the topography of the Wye valley is *not sublime* according to the poet's received notions of the term, and is therefore as far removed as can be hoped from the horrible sublimity he associates with Salisbury.

Perhaps my own understanding of the loss/recovery tension at work in *Tintern Abbey* can be best foregrounded by contrast with the works of New Historicism. Among New Historicists, again, Marjorie Levinson's reading of this poem has been the most influential. In the description of the natural scene at the Wye, Levinson argues that "we are bound to see that Wordsworth's pastoral prospect is a fragile affair, artfully assembled by acts of exclusion" (32). The concept of Romantic Ideology dictates that that which is excluded is the social realm, left out of the poem because of Wordsworth's belief that art can and should be transhistorical. Against the poet's description of a constant natural background, Levinson points out that much of the Wye's surrounding area was being spoiled by industrialization at the time the poem was being composed, and that the number of homeless people roaming the woods around the town of Tintern had increased alarmingly in recent years. These social facts quite obviously do not find an explicit place in the poem.

Levinson does not discuss the Salisbury Plain poems in the context of *Tintern Abbey*, but we might recall the compassionate and very detailed description of actual vagrants in the earlier poetry. As opposed to specific explication of the miseries visited on individuals by Oppression, Wordsworth in the first verse paragraph of *Tintern Abbey* observes

> wreathes of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
> With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
> Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
> Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
> The hermit sits alone. (18-23)

Despite the evocation of vagrant and hermit, the wreathes of smoke in actuality come from farms "green to the very door" (18). The seeming ambiguity of the smoke's source is a virtue from Wordsworth's perspective, a testament to the farms' aesthetic unobtrusiveness, of the way the individual elements of the Wye scene tend to blend together. Levinson does not concern herself with hermits, but the thrust of her analysis is that there are not only a number of actual vagrants wandering through the woods conveniently just beyond the

boundaries of the poem, but an *increasing* number; that Wordsworth's poetry is willfully oblivious to the happening of history in its vicinity. The psychological upshot of Romantic Ideology is that history is repressed, and of course repressed material is fated to return in another form, hence the seemingly innocent reference to "vagrant dwellers."

According to Levinson's reading, Wordsworth's blank verse meditation is grounded in a need to repress the uncomfortable social dimension of the Wye valley in 1798, which insists on a disguised presence in the work. One further specific example from Levinson's reading may suffice. The pastoral farms producing the smoke, again, are described as being "green to the very door," making them a suitable part of the indistinct aesthetic object the poet sees before him. In Levinson's reading this feature of the landscape becomes an unconscious commentary on the exploitation of the working poor: "The cottage plots noted in the poem are 'green to the very door' because the common lands had been enclosed some time back and the only arable land remaining to the cottager was his front garden" (30). Wordsworth seems to be enchanted by the cottages because they blend in with the surrounding greenery, but behind this he is haunted by a thought of the existent power structure, and needs in some way to confess "his own enabling insertion in a system he could not consciously abide" (46).

In my reading, Wordsworth is driven to repress a thought of Salisbury Plain rather than the Wye valley. In 1798 the poet is writing about his first trip to the area in 1793, on the way to visit his Cambridge friend Robert Jones (with whom he visited the Simplon Pass) in Wales. The visit to the Tintern area occurs immediately after the poet's walk across Salisbury Plain, where—in Alan Liu's phrase—Wordsworth received his poetic commandment (*Sense of History* 200), discussed in veiled form in Book XII of *The Prelude*. While from a New Historicist viewpoint the commandment is to repress history, I argue that the substance of Wordsworth's Sarum experience is a traumatic encounter with the Lacanian Real, and that it is the trauma associated with this encounter which is repressed in a variety of ways during the Great Decade. One of the ways Wordsworth defends himself against the Real is through the poetry of the egotistical sublime, of which *Tintern Abbey* is a prime example.

The egotistical sublime is articulated in Wordsworth by means of a screen memory, a Freudian concept I will discuss in some detail in the portion of this chapter dealing with paragraphs two and three of the poem. In a screen memory, a present psychic need is answered by the seemingly coincidental appearance of a seemingly unrelated memory; as often happens with dreams, repressed material—in a disguised form—finds its way into the memory. This perhaps will suggest that Levinson would see the poet's 1793 recollection of the Wye valley as a memory screening the 1798 pressure of history; and indeed her discussion of memory in the poem suggests Freud. In examining *Tintern Abbey*, however, I do not see the plight of the poor as a thought too traumatic to find conscious expression. Wordsworth had shown no such delicacy in his earlier verse, and it is salutary to recall that the Salisbury Plain excerpt called "The Female Vagrant"—an unambiguous and clearly conscious indictment of the social order—was published in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* alongside *Tintern Abbey*. Indeed, if my reading of *Salisbury Plain* has accomplished little else, I hope it is obvious to the reader that Wordsworth not only is willing to write about what he calls Oppression, but that he turns to such stories with a palpable sense of relief at having found a Symbolic barrier against the trauma of the Real. In *Tintern Abbey* the 1793 memory of the Wye screens not history, which in my opinion Wordsworth has little enough need to avoid, but rather the 1793 experience of the Real on Salisbury Plain, or perhaps we might even say *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* (which for Wordsworth is a quite similar thing).

But why the Wye? Obviously any number of memories might serve the function of screening the past encounter with the Real, but I will try to make the argument (in my discussion of paragraph one of the poem) that there are certain features of the natural scene described in *Tintern Abbey* that make it especially attractive to a poet with a pressing need to avoid the trauma associated with Salisbury Plain. I suggested in my chapter on the Salisbury Plain poems that there are parallels between an experience of the Lacanian Real and the eighteenth century natural sublime: just as the Kantian sublime triggers an intuition of a supersensible realm underlying physical reality, so the Real prompts a momentary recognition of an alien substructure immediately beneath our everyday Symbolic existence. Critics have alternately found the source of the Wordsworthian sublime in either

Burke or Kant, but, as I believe Thomas Weiskel has definitively shown, the egotistical sublime is in reality the semiotic opposite of the oppressive natural sublime to which Wordsworth was heir (and regardless of which theorists he might have read). My belief is that the Burkeian/Kantian model reminded Wordsworth too much of the trauma he associated with the Real, and that in constructing the egotistical sublime he is unconsciously driven to a particularly nonthreatening version of natural transcendence. As I will try to show, I believe that the virtue of the Wye greenery is that it consummately fails to suggest "the sublime" as Wordsworth received the term. What had been a traumatic experience of the Real on Salisbury Plain was repressed, and later articulated in a different form as the egotistical sublime in the memory of the Wye. Other than the "nonsublime" quality of the scene near Tintern (the way the elements of the scene blend together, at least in Wordsworth's vision), the 1793 memory of the Wye is selected as the repository for Wordsworth's moment of transcendence because it occurred immediately after the Salisbury Plain trauma that it screens. As with the Salisbury Plain poems, Wordsworth uses language in *Tintern Abbey* as a means of avoiding the Real, but his manner of doing this has become more sophisticated.

The egotistical sublime is, despite the undeniable power of *Tintern Abbey*'s rhetoric, finally an unworkable solution to the problem of the Real, and in later poetry Wordsworth will try to find other answers, eventually incorporating his version of sublimity into *The Prelude* as one discrete stage in the growth of the poet's mind. A developmental model of sorts is already at work in *Tintern Abbey*, of course: the kind of metaphysical insights the 1798 Wordsworth has access to were unavailable when the poet was five years younger, and at the time of the poem's composition he is able to measure his emotional growth against the constancy of the natural scene. It is partly this model of growth, I believe, which makes the egotistical sublime in *Tintern Abbey* untenable. The pressures of the screen memory force Wordsworth to describe his twenty-three year-old self in absurdly idyllic—indeed childlike—terms, arguing that the most significant personality development of his life occurred at some unspecified point in his mid-twenties. This reflects Wordsworth's unconscious need to see his younger self as emotionally whole (and thus a child), rather than as a traumatized adult susceptible of the Real.

As many critics have noted, *Tintern Abbey* is shot through with doubts, as Wordsworth continually qualifies his descriptions both of sublime insight and of his earlier self. Though not familiar with modern notions of the unconscious motives of memory, Wordsworth seems both aware of and surprisingly candid about the limitations of his ability to recollect 1793: "I cannot paint / What then I was" (76-77). But it will be the appearance of the poet's sister Dorothy in the final verse paragraph that gives the definitive lie to the tale of the egotistical sublime. Just as Wordsworth describes his own former self in childlike terms, so he sees in his sister's famously wild eyes "what I was once" (121), relegating her to a point of radical immaturity many critics have found dubious given the fact that she was actually only a year and a half younger than her brother. In the precarious chronology of the egotistical sublime, enlightenment occurs sometime in one's twenties, it seems, and Dorothy is not yet there. Critics have seen Wordsworth as condescending to his sister, and perhaps this is the case, but he is similarly dismissive of the faculties he himself had possessed on his first visit to the Wye. Critics such as John Barrell have been disturbed by Wordsworth's seeming need to keep Dorothy in a subordinate position, but the poet himself will also ultimately be troubled by his sister's position in the poem, working as she does to subvert the plausibility of the timeline he associates with the egotistical sublime.

Wordsworth to a certain extent is able to rework the material of a five year old memory, and perhaps in isolation he would be able to maintain the illusion that at twenty-three he was radically different than he is at twenty-eight. Dorothy, however, is a big problem: as a flesh and blood person joining her brother on his second visit to the Wye valley, she can not be imaginatively altered to fit realistically into the model of the egotistical sublime. Her adulthood is undeniable, before the poet's eyes. As Wordsworth composes his version of transcendence, evidence of its inherent contradictions is in front of him in the form of his sibling. It is ultimately, I believe, the troubling presence of Dorothy in *Tintern Abbey* that will force Wordsworth to a more comprehensive and plausible analysis of personal growth in *The Prelude*. In my previous chapter I discussed in some detail the notion of the Real as a threat to the Symbolic world we construct for ourselves through language. In much the same way Dorothy gives the lie to the grand pronouncements of *Tintern Abbey*, pointing out the weaknesses

of her brother's model of emotional growth. While it would no doubt be going too far to describe Dorothy herself as the Real, I believe that in her subversive, contradictory facticity she may be seen as *the threat of the Real*. The egotistical sublime is a defense against the trauma associated with the Real, and Dorothy in her very being points out the flimsiness of that defense, that it might give way at any moment. In fact, I believe it is the very presence of Dorothy by Wordsworth's side in 1798 that prompts the composition of *Tintern Abbey* and the first ingenious expression of the egotistical sublime. Toying with a comforting notion of transcendence, Wordsworth comes with his sister to the Wye valley, which diverges from his received notions of the sublime in a way ideal for his purposes. But there is something not quite right about his sister, something that does not fit in with the nascent egotistical sublime. Faced with the disturbing presence of Dorothy, his spontaneous and stunning response is *Tintern Abbey*, which expresses his version of the benevolent sublime. But Dorothy of course remains in the poem as a destabilizing presence, or absence rather, the shuddering foundation of the blank verse Symbolic edifice Wordsworth constructs at the Wye.

A Sweet and Quiet Sublime: Revisions of Burke and/or Kant In Paragraph One

> Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters! and again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a sweet inland murmur.—Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> Which on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
> The day is come when I again repose
> Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
> These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
> Which, at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Among the woods and copses lose themselves,
> Nor, with their green and simple hue, disturb

> The wild green landscape. Once again I see
> These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
> Of sportive wood run wild; these pastoral farms
> Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke
> Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
> With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
> Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
> Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
> The hermit sits alone. (1-23)

The first verse paragraph of *Tintern Abbey* is devoted to a seemingly straightforward description of the natural scene at the Wye; the poet's reaction to the scenery, his feeling of sublime transcendence, is delayed until the second paragraph. Taking the first paragraph as a self-contained entity, it is, I think, revealing to imagine how an eighteenth century theorist of the sublime like Burke or Kant would react to these lines. Clearly these thinkers would not apply the term "sublime" to the nature description at the beginning of the poem. Perhaps the one feature of this landscape that might have served as the occasion for a traditional sublime experience is the "steep and lofty cliffs" of line five. Objects of great dimensions are seen as sublime in both Burke and Kant. In Burke's associationism the sublime is ultimately biological, caused by physical pain; extremely large objects force the eye to try to take in too much sense data, and "the fine nerves and muscles destined to the motion of that part must be very much strained; and their great sensibility must make them highly affected by this straining" (125). Similarly (sort of) Kant's mathematical sublime is triggered by an extremely large object in nature. When the object is too large for the imagination to comprehend in a single glance, Kant tells us, and the imagination consequently feels a sense of defeat and humiliation, the reason steps in with its ability to conceptualize infinity, and the subject recovers.

In both Burke and Kant, the subject is momentarily menaced by the large sublime object, and it will be obvious to the reader that a towering cliff could in either case provide an occasion for the sublime. Without speculating on whether Wordsworth in *Tintern Abbey* is responding to Burke or to Kant (or perhaps to both), the poet obviously describes neither optic nerve nor imagination as being disturbed by

anything at the Wye, and the cliffs (as far as we are told) are as benign as the other elements of the vista. The cliffs do not stand out from the other natural elements, and such prominence is a traditional feature of the sublime: the sublime object is so vast or powerful that it fills up the senses and mind to the exclusion of other considerations. Thus, according to Burke, "arises the great power of the sublime, that far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force" (53).

It will be readily apparent that the cliffs in *Tintern Abbey* exert no such influence on the poet:

> Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> Which on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (4-8)

The impression caused by the cliffs is not depicted as overpowering in the manner that Burke and Kant describe. More importantly, the cliffs not only do not blot out consideration of other aesthetic objects; on the contrary, they are seen as a connector for landscape and sky, a means to an end. We might speculate on why the cliffs do not function the way they traditionally do in sublime theory (Kant suggests that we must be a certain distance from the object for a sublime experience to occur (*Critique* 108-09), and perhaps on the horizon the cliffs are too distant), but in any case Wordsworth's cliffs are stripped of the sublime power the other theorists would find in them. Instead we might remark their most notable feature as their indistinctness, the fact that they blend in with the rest of the scene so perfectly.

In this respect the cliffs are like the other parts of the Wye valley as Wordsworth sees them. Indeed I believe it is in the equal indistinctness of its elements that the scene appeals to Wordsworth's emotional needs: nothing sticks out, nothing commands his attention. As David Ferry points out (107), it happens that as Wordsworth comes to the valley in July the fruit on the orchard-tufts has not ripened, and thus the green of the landscape is unbroken, and these crops "lose themselves" in the wilderness. The orchard-tufts are not only the right color; they also fortunately occlude their status as evidence of a human

presence at the Wye. Then there are the hedge-rows, "hardly hedge-rows," which have "run wild," which have become simply another part of nature. Even the farms are seen as an intrinsic part of the landscape, "green to the very door." Those familiar with William Gilpin's theory of the picturesque have found a strong echo in *Tintern Abbey*: "when hedge-row trees begin to unite, and lengthen into streaks along the horizon—when farm-houses, and ordinary buildings lose all their vulgarity of shape, and are scattered about, in formless spots, through the several parts of a distance—it is inconceivable what richness, and beauty, this mass of deformity, when melted together, adds to landscape" (qtd. in Roe, *Politics of Nature* 119). The more picturesque a scene is, it seems, the less sublime, according to a traditional definition.

One of the effects of this picturesque "melting" is to make the scene seem more secluded than it in fact is, to further the poet's illusion that, with the exception of his sister, he is alone. I believe I have prepared the reader for Marjorie Levinson's reading of this phenomenon: "Lines 1-22—to all appearances, a series of timeless, spiritually suggestive pastoral impressions—in fact represent a concretely motivated attempt to green an actualized political prospect and to hypostatize the resultant fiction, a product of memory and desire" (15). From this perspective, everything is seen as vague because seeing it distinctly in its exploitative nature is not something Wordsworth can consciously bear. Again, I think the best argument against this New Historicist interpretation of the Wye greenery is the fact that in many other roughly contemporary works (including the Salisbury Plain poems) Wordsworth shows no squeamishness about describing a political prospect in all its ugly detail.

Levinson sees an unconscious motivation on Wordsworth's part to see the landscape as it is not, but it is worth noting that the poet's vision is not so green that he fails to notice that among the woods and copses human beings have planted orchards, or to recognize that the cottages—green to the door though they may be—are cottages. The point here is that Wordsworth does not fail to see the things that are there; rather, these things do not command one's attention, do not force the subject to see their individual lineaments as distinct from the larger landscape. In a traditional sense, they are not sublime, and this is precisely why they are sublime for Wordsworth: the pressures of the

Real sublime force Wordsworth to search for a notion of sublimity that is the opposite of the Burkeian/Kantian model.

This notion of a Wordsworthian sublime that is in some respects the opposite of its antecedents does not originate with me. Thomas Weiskel in *The Romantic Sublime* brilliantly contrasts the Kantian or negative sublime with the Wordsworthian or positive (which I call the egotistical sublime). Weiskel's particular innovation is to analyze the Romantic sublime in semiotic terms: in Kant external reality signifies too much; in Wordsworth, too little. With respect to Kant, this can be illustrated through the *Critique of Judgment*'s description of the imagination's limitations in comprehending large objects:

> Apprehension involves no problem, for it may progress to infinity. But comprehension becomes more and more difficult the farther apprehension progresses, and it soon reaches its maximum, namely, the aesthetically largest basic measure for an estimation of magnitude. For when apprehension has reached the point where the partial presentations of sensible intuition that were first apprehended are already beginning to be extinguished in the imagination, as it proceeds to apprehend further ones, the imagination then loses as much on the one side as it gains on the other; and so there is a maximum in comprehension that it cannot exceed. (108)

Apprehension here refers to the power of the imagination to take in raw sense data, and knows no limitation: no matter the size of the object, our gaze can travel along it until the whole has been surveyed. Comprehension is the ability to collect the apprehended material together in a unitary impression, and there is a definite limit to this faculty; when this is reached, the imagination is defeated, and reason saves the day with the sublime thought of infinity. To use a crude but possibly helpful metaphor, we might describe the imagination as a bottle: comprehension may be seen as the interior of the vessel, and apprehension as its mouth. With objects of great enough magnitude, the imagination reaches its maximum capacity; obviously the mouth of the bottle remains open to receive more sense data, but exactly as much as is poured in will overflow.

In a modern idiom we would call this "filling" of the imagination sensory overload. Burke's notion that the muscles of the eye are strained by looking at a large object is roughly consistent with this. From Weiskel's perspective the negative sublime is about receiving too much information: the natural object signifies too much. In the positive sublime, conversely, reality does not signify enough, and the mind rushes in to fill the gap. Weiskel describes the mind's action in the egotistical sublime as sublimation, which "melts the formal otherness of things and reduces them to material or to substance. The formal properties of the perceived particular are canceled and replaced by their 'significance,' values assessed and assigned by the mind" (59). This description could have been (and in my opinion very likely was) written with the opening paragraph of *Tintern Abbey* in mind. We think of the cottages green to the very door, the orchard-tufts that lose themselves in the woods, and especially of the hedge-rows which are described as "hardly" hedge-rows. Things a few miles above Tintern Abbey are barely what they are, allowing the mind to see them as an amorphous mass of green, leading to the sublime movement I will examine in the poem's second paragraph. Returning to my bottle metaphor, we have a vessel in no danger of being filled by the insubstantial, gaseous material at the Wye, expanding indefinitely in the quest to find something to contain.

Again, I do not think, as Levinson does, that the blending together of objects here is a lie told by Wordsworth's unconscious out of a need to repress the social. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I would suggest that Wordsworth's description of the scene in *Tintern Abbey* may be taken as objectively valid. Certainly Gilpin suggests this is the way such scenes actually appear, given the proper distance. Wordsworth does not repress any of the features of the landscape he sees in 1798; rather he uses the accurate memory of the landscape as it appeared in 1793 as a screen for the trauma he experienced on Salisbury Plain.

In my previous chapter I tried to suggest some of the ways Wordsworth's encounter with the Real shared features with the traditional natural sublime. Wordsworth certainly had some familiarity with the eighteenth century sublime, though it is perhaps undecidable whether he thought of Burke or Kant—or perhaps of both—when he heard or used the term "sublime." In any case, Wordsworth in 1798 had

a powerful motive not to remember the sublime experience that had befallen him five years earlier, and his unconscious response was to foreground a different 1793 memory. Needing to repress the traumatic experience of Salisbury Plain—and perfectly cognizant of its similarity to received notions of sublimity—Wordsworth used the pastoral landscape of the Wye in 1798 as a springboard to the explicit expression of his own version of transcendence, the egotistical sublime (an idea I believe he had been toying with for some time, particularly at those moments between 1793 and 1798 when the pressures of the Real forced a seemingly incongruous memory of the Wye valley). As Weiskel so neatly shows on a semiotic level, the positive Wordsworthian sublime is the opposite of the negative Kantian. I have tried in this section to show that at the Wye Wordsworth discovered a topography peculiarly suited for what we might call an antisublime, thus its selection as the location of a "sublime" memory. The pressures of the Real sublime forced Wordsworth unconsciously to see the sublime as its opposite, and the coincidence of his coming to the Wye, with its subtly blending shades of green, so soon after his own sublime experience, made the scene irresistible—and durably evocative—for the poet. Levinson describes the fictionalized Wye valley as "a product of memory and desire" (15). I see the landscape in Tintern Abbey as solid and real enough, but Levinson's characterization of it works well as a description of the sublime movement in paragraph two of the poem, though at that point memory and desire are much the same thing.

A Vain Belief: Screen Memory in Paragraphs Two and Three

> Though absent long,
> These forms of beauty have not been to me,
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
> Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
> In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
> Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
> And passing even into my purer mind
> With tranquil restoration:—feelings too

Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
As may have had no trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life;
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love. (23-36)

For a poem about memory, *Tintern Abbey* treats its subject with tremendous ambivalence. The lines quoted above are the first discussion in the poem of the impact the previous visit to the Wye has had in the intervening five years, and it is notable that Wordsworth does not describe actually remembering the event. (The word "*un*remembered" (italics mine) appears twice, reflecting, I believe, an unconscious doubt about the claims he makes for the memory's efficacy.) Throughout the poem, Wordsworth seems strangely reticent about using the word "memory": he says that his spirit has often "turned" (56) to the Wye; memory is described early in paragraph four as the "picture of the mind" (62); the new memories formed in 1798 will be "life and food" (65) for his future self; in Dorothy's youthful voice he hears "the language of my former heart" (118). Wordsworth tends to describe memory as if it were a matter of the sense rather than the mind: it can be seen, tasted, and heard. Kant calls this sort of misidentification subreption. My belief is that the seeming disjunction between memory and its source reflects Wordsworth's uneasiness about the claims he makes for the significance of the recollection. Notably, "memory" and "remember" both appear in the poem once, toward its conclusion and in reference to Dorothy.

The beginning of paragraph two is typical in its treatment of memory. The 1793 recollection is first described (or not described) in visual terms: the Wye has not been like "a landscape to a blind man's eye." Readers familiar with Harold Bloom's interpretation of *Tintern Abbey* in *Poetry and Repression* might here see an allusion to Milton, but as a description of the access Wordsworth has had to the memory in the last five years it is strangely banal: the scene, though out of sight, has not been out of mind. Of perhaps more interest is the description of the specific effect the natural objects of the Wye have had: Wordsworth in his lonely moments has "owed to them" "sensations sweet." It will be obvious to the reader that there is an inherent ambiguity in this account. "Owing" to the pastoral landscape can take a number of

different forms: we can easily imagine the placid and quiet memory coming in periodically to rescue the poet from the din of towns and cities; but Wordsworth's phrasing, which does not denote memory, makes it possible that the 1793 visit to the Wye has somehow boosted his resilience to the towns and cities, without a specific recollection being necessary. The obvious implication, of course, is that a memory of the scenery has triggered the "sensations sweet," but Wordsworth's unwillingness to say so explicitly shows doubts about the true source of those sensations, about their legitimacy. Though it could certainly be argued that memory is by its nature a shadowy and ambiguous thing, and that Wordsworth is simply being candid about the difficulties he finds to be associated with this faculty, I believe that the sheer *volume* of qualifications he gives to the recollection of the 1793 Wye visit is reflective of a more specific and profound anxiety.

Reflecting Wordsworth's subreption of memory, the sensations are first described in what might be considered physical terms ("Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart") and then, as if it is unusual or even paradoxical, it is added that they have "even" found their way into the poet's "purer mind." "Purer mind," a seeming redundance, adds another layer of ambiguity to this vexed passage, possibly suggesting that the "blood" and "heart" of the previous line are actually to be taken as part of the mind, a "less pure" part. It would not be so unusual for Wordsworth to see the mind as having different sections or compartments, but he does nothing in these lines to make his meaning clear.

In addition to the sweet sensations, Wordsworth has owed to the Wye "feelings too / Of unremembered pleasure." The adjective here is problematic: if the pleasure is unremembered, how does the poet know he has experienced it, much less ascertain that it was caused by impressions of the Wye? Whatever the nature of these feelings, they are suggested as the motivation for "unremembered" acts of kindness. Wordsworth does not identify such acts explicitly with himself, but rather with a generic "good man." As if this does not express the full extent of Wordsworth's ambivalence about the memory, the influence of the unremembered pleasures on the unremembered acts is qualified twice, by "perhaps" and "may have had."

I hope this summary of lines 23 to 36 gives an adequate picture of the doubts Wordsworth associated with his 1793 memory of the

Wye. These doubts, again, relate not to the authenticity of the memory (he obviously did visit the scene in 1793, and does not notice on his 1798 visit that he has been mistaken in his recollection of the scenery), but rather to its influence on his psychic wellbeing over the course of the five years following its formation. It is the nature of a screen memory to recur at unusual times, and the memory itself can often seem inexplicable: why would a memory of walking along an admittedly pleasant river valley, a memory in which nothing of earth-shattering importance seemingly happened, be so foregrounded in the young poet's psyche? Obviously the Wye is lovely in Wordsworth's estimation, but as *The Prelude* and any number of other poems bear witness, Wordsworth spent much of his life responding to the beauty of nature, and in a wide range of locales; so why the Wye?

I have tried to suggest the ways the features of the landscape might have appealed to Wordsworth's need for a nonthreatening version of the natural sublime, but this is of course an unconscious need, and we can imagine the recurrence of the Wye imagery in lonely rooms and elsewhere having been bewildering to the poet. The response he makes to this confusion (and it only becomes definitive with the composition of *Tintern Abbey,* which happens significantly in the presence of his sister) is to posit the egotistical sublime, the significance of which I shall examine shortly. His doubts (well-founded) about the true meaning of the egotistical sublime are to be seen in the many qualifications he gives to the memory at the beginning of paragraph two. Wordsworth's doubts are typical of a screen memory, a Freudian insight which predates classical psychoanalysis.

Freud's paper "Screen Memories" was written in 1899, one year before the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Freud illustrates the principle via an example which is claimed to be drawn from his clinical practice; the general consensus is that this is a fiction, that Freud is both analyst and analysand, though his reasons for disguising his identity are not clear, and he elsewhere (as with the dream of Irma's injection) shows no delicacy about explicitly interrogating his own psychic processes. In any case, the "patient" in this account is discussing childhood memories. The question he poses is, Why are some memories retained and not others? With some memories, the answer to this question seems obvious: some relate to events that, from the perspective of adulthood, may be regarded as formative; some he

suspects were retained simply because they were described in detail numerous times by his parents. But there is another type of memory, whose significance is much less clear, of which the patient is compelled to ask (as I believe Wordsworth was of the first trip to the Wye valley), "Now what is there is this occurrence to justify the expenditure of memory which it has occasioned me?" (*Freud Reader* 119)

The patient gives Freud an example of this perplexing kind of memory, and as an illustration of the recalcitrance of screen memories, it will be useful to quote his description in full:

> I see a rectangular, rather steeply sloping piece of meadow-land, green and thickly grown; in the green there are a great number of yellow flowers—evidently common dandelions. At the top end of the meadow there is a cottage and in front of the cottage door two women are standing and chatting busily, a peasant-woman with a handkerchief on her head and a children's nurse. Three children are playing in the grass. One of them is myself (between the age of two and three); the two others are my boy cousin, who is a year older than me, and his sister, who is almost exactly the same age as I am. We are picking the yellow flowers and each of us is holding a bunch of flowers we have already picked. The little girl has the best bunch; and, as though by mutual agreement, we—the two boys—fall on her and snatch away her flowers. She runs up the meadow in tears and as a consolation the peasant-woman gives her a big piece of black bread. Hardly have we seen this than we throw the flowers away, hurry to the cottage and ask to be given some bread too. And we are in fact given some; the peasant-woman cuts the loaf with a long knife. In my memory the bread tastes quite delicious—and at that point the scene breaks off. (119)

It is easy to share the patient's bewilderment, to wonder why such a seemingly insignificant remembrance would recur with such vividness and frequency. Such confusion at the frequent reappearance of the 1793 Wye memory is what occasions the theory of the egotistical sublime.

With the childhood memory from Freud's essay, a long conversation between doctor and patient is necessary to elucidate the importance of the memory. Through a very involved analysis, it comes out that the memory relates to two separate fantasies: a powerful desire for material comfort (represented by the bread which is so delicious), and an equally powerful impulse toward sexual gratification (represented by the "deflowering" of the girl). Important in this analysis is the fact that the fantasies in question are adult ones, and that the patient did not start remembering the scene until his young adulthood. Screen memories are recalled to protect us from a *present* psychic threat. As an adult Freud's patient is not consciously able to come to terms with implications of the two fantasies; when the fantasies threaten to break through to the conscious mind, the childhood memory intervenes to protect him, bringing with it the unthinkable material, in a different form. It will be obvious to my reader that the threat I believe occasions Wordsworth's recourse to the Wye memory is the trauma associated with the Real sublime as he encountered it on Salisbury Plain immediately prior to coming to the idyllic woodland scene for the first time. Whatever happened to Wordsworth on Sarum is unthinkable, and the nonthreatening, *nonsublime* pastoral imagery from paragraph one of *Tintern Abbey* is precisely what he needs to safeguard him. The repressed material shows up in the poem in the benign—indeed reassuring—form of the egotistical sublime, not a part of the memory per se, but a part of his reaction to it, of the use he made of it in the five years following his first walk along the banks of the Wye.

A final comment should be made about "Screen Memories," with respect to the authenticity of such recollections. Throughout the course of the conversation in Freud's paper, doctor and patient question whether the latter's childhood memory actually happened. While Freud is quick to acknowledge that with memories we can never know for certain, he sees little reason to suspect that the memory was invented by his patient. On their face the events it recounts do not seem implausible; rather this memory can be thought of as one among countless other possible recollections, a memory whose contours coincidentally are capable of bearing the material the patient is compelled to repress. In this essay, at least, Freudian memory is more

of an editor than a writer, though this caveat is scrupulously added to the discussion:

> It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. (126)

In recounting the memory of the flowers and bread, Freud's patient (evidently Freud himself) expresses a conviction that the event actually happened, and also that there is "something not quite right" (120) about the recollection. Wordsworth through *Tintern Abbey* shows a healthy doubt, an intuition that his remembered sensations of the Wye may be half a matter of perception, and half of creation.

Such doubts, I believe, are responsible for much of the dissonance recent criticism has found in the poem. Perhaps the single most famous icon of the Romantic Ideology is to be found in the fact that Tintern Abbey appears in the title of the poem but not in its text, a fact exploited by Marjorie Levinson, who sees in the actual abbey (and in the town of Tintern) an instance of social reality Wordsworth needs to repress. Certainly the appearance of the abbey *only* in the title is intriguing, but as Thomas McFarland points out (6), the abbey is the most well-known local landmark, and may simply be in the title as a way of "placing" the location for Wordsworth's audience.

But Freud would no doubt agree with Levinson that there is more at work in *Tintern Abbey* than a purely objective five year old memory. One of the long-standing myths associated with the literature of romanticism is spontaneity (the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* of course has played a large part in this), and with *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth has contributed to this myth with the famous claim that it was composed extempore, and not a line changed. The legend that has attached itself to this poem—and this is of course aided and abetted by the poetry itself—is that Wordsworth had two discrete, self-contained encounters with a scene of great natural beauty, and that the poetry composed in July of 1798 is a response to the second such encounter, unmediated by anything other than Wordsworth's own emotions and recollections.

We know better now, and this is largely due to the healthy suspicions of poets' motives engendered by the works of New Historicism. Marilyn Butler has convincingly made the argument that the "experimental" poetry of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in its use of common language and rustic subject, was in fact a fairly conventional contribution to a subgenre of verse that had been established for over thirty years. More specifically with respect to *Tintern Abbey*, Mary Jacobus has argued that this poem, more than any of his other works, "is the poem for which Wordsworth's predecessors had smoothed the way" (*Tradition and Experiment* 104). The works of such predecessors in landscape poetry as William Lisle Bowles, providing Wordsworth with a ready-made structure for his work, ironically allowed his composition to seem all the more "spontaneous": "Established traditions of landscape poetry made it possible to compose a poem as complex as 'Tintern Abbey' during a tour of only a few days" (105). Bowles' sonnet "To the River Itchin, near Winton" is representative of the tradition to which Wordsworth is responding:

> ITCHIN, when I behold thy banks again,
> Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,
> On which the self-same tints still seem to rest,
> Why feels my heart the shiv'ring sense of pain?
> Is it, that many a summer's day has past
> Since, in life's morn, I carol'd on thy side?
> Is it, that oft, since then, my heart has sigh'd,
> As Youth, and Hope's delusive gleams, flew fast?
> Is it that those, who circled on thy shore,
> Companions of my youth, now meet no more?
> *What'er the cause, upon thy banks I bend*
> Sorrowing, yet feel such solace at my heart,
> As at the meeting of some long-lost friend,
> From whom, in happier hours, we wept to part.
> (qtd. in Jacobus 115)

It would be belittling to Wordsworth's accomplishment in *Tintern Abbey* to take this comparison to a very great length, but even as short a poem as this sonnet shows that Wordsworth had influences at the Wye other than his own unmediated experience.

This may seem a relatively banal comment; there is of course no such thing as a complete absence of style (spontaneous overflow of emotion or not), and we would not expect *Tintern Abbey* to have burst fully grown from Wordsworth's imagination. Of more interest than a comparison with Bowles is the examination of a fragment Wordsworth himself had written in 1797:

> Yet once again do I behold the forms
> Of these huge mountains, and yet once again,
> Standing beneath these elms, I hear thy voice,
> Beloved Derwent, that peculiar voice
> Heard in the stillness of the evening air,
> Half-heard and half-created. (qtd. in Brinkley 128)

The parallels with *Tintern Abbey* are obvious, most strikingly in the final line, of which the later poem's "what they half-create, / And what perceive" is an obvious echo. This leads one to wonder to what extent the sublimity of *Tintern Abbey* is dependent on the specific natural imagery of the Wye. Examining the Derwent fragment, it becomes difficult to disagree with Robert A. Brinkley's assertion: "The tour of the Wye Valley in 1798 seems to have given Wordsworth the opportunity to complete a poem he already had in mind" (128). What Wordsworth had in mind, unconsciously, was the Real sublime of 1793, and his return visit to the Wye in 1798 allowed him to call up the 1793 visit as a defense.

There is also Wordsworth's sister Dorothy's journal writing as a possible point of mediation between his verse and the sense data taken in at the Wye. It is a commonplace that much of Wordsworth's most vivid natural description finds its source not in his own observation but in a perusal of his sister's journals. Nicholas Roe has drawn our attention to her description of a prospect from the Quantock Hills dated February 24, 1798. The connection is perhaps not quite so obvious as with the Derwent fragment, but the prose is suggestive, to say the least: "Sat a considerable time over-looking the country towards the sea...scattered farm-houses, half-concealed by green mossy orchards, fresh straw lying at the doors...the choice meadow plots, full of sheep and lambs, of a soft and vivid green; a few wreaths of blue smoke, spreading along the ground..." (qtd. in *Politics of Nature* 120)

There is, finally, the question of the date in the title, July 13, 1798, which Levinson notes is *almost* the anniversary of Bastille Day. The proximity to a date which would certainly bear great significance to a poet who had been a partisan of the French Revolution is intriguing, but it would have been more convenient for the New Historicist position if Wordsworth had written the poem on July 14; Thomas McFarland is right, I believe, to wonder how much credence we should give to such a "near miss" (4). More interestingly, strong biographical evidence suggests that the date in the title is wrong, if it is intended to signify the second encounter with the Wye greenery: on the 13th Wordsworth and his sister were on a boat headed to Bristol, placing the events of the poem a couple of days earlier. McFarland, recently the most passionate and eloquent defender of *Tintern Abbey* against what he sees as the "patronizing" readings of New Historicism, suggests (6) this can be explained by taking July 13th as the day that the emotions of the second Wye visit were "recollected in tranquillity," and the poem composed. This is plausible, although I believe the title of the poem claims July 13th unambiguously as the date of both the experience and the composition. (McFarland would perhaps respond that it is at least as likely that Wordsworth would have been careless in the phrasing of his title, as his lying about or mistaking the date.)

In my opinion these various facts taken together—the obvious influence of eighteenth century landscape poetry, the possible influence of Dorothy's journals, the biographical ambiguity of the date, and most importantly the existence of the 1797 Derwent fragment—point to the status of the 1793 recollection as a screen memory. On a level which is surely not conscious, Wordsworth is aware that the real motivation of *Tintern Abbey* is displaced onto a relatively generic five year old memory of visiting the Wye valley. The nonsublimity of the natural scene at the Wye is used to great effect in the poem, but beyond this quality (which it presumably shares with a number of other scenes in Wordsworth's experience) there is little seemingly to recommend it. The fact that, as an unmediated experience in July of 1798, the Wye does not hold the significance the poet wants it to have, leads the poet to add several layers of mediation: eighteenth century landscape poetry, Dorothy's journals, his own earlier writing. In a move in itself suggestive of the egotistical sublime, if the scene does not signify enough, Wordsworth will add significance to it. The business of the

date of composition is relatively minor, to be sure, but it may well be a "mistake" insisted upon by Wordsworth's unconscious due to a recognition that the psychic energy of this work finally has nothing to do with a particular place and time; the pressures of the Real are recurrent ones—Wordsworth is compelled to repeat—and *Tintern Abbey* is simply one response made in July of 1798, one that would ultimately not satisfy, its spectacular success as poetry notwithstanding.

As Lacan's analysis of the dream of Irma's injection shows, one very effective response to the menace of the Real is some version of the Symbolic; in Wordsworth's case the typical response evidently was poetry. Wordsworth's fragment about the Derwent is an earlier response to the Real sublime, and fails on a poetic as well as a defensive level. We could certainly speculate on the reasons for this. It could be simply a matter of literary or intellectual development: perhaps it was only in 1798 that Wordsworth was capable of articulating a concept as sophisticated as the egotistical sublime. The Derwent fragment is too short to be of much interpretive value, but it is perhaps worth noting that the features of the landscape in the poet's description do not blend together as described in paragraph one of *Tintern Abbey*. In my discussion of the opening section of the poem, I suggested that one of the things that must have appealed to Wordsworth about the Wye valley, vis a vis the egotistical sublime, was the indistinctness of things, the difficulty of knowing where nature ended and cottage began. It may be that the features of the Wye valley—which again must not have been unique in Wordsworth's experience—happily coincided with a relatively sudden flowering of Wordsworth's poetic genius (perhaps influenced by Coleridge and/or the *Lyrical Ballads* project), with the result being one hundred and sixty lines of blank verse, among the finest Wordsworth ever wrote. There is also the close temporal proximity of the poet's 1793 Wye and Salisbury Plain experiences to consider, which brings up a final biographical point.

In 1793 Wordsworth had gone from Salisbury Plain to Bristol, then to the Wye valley and on into Wales to visit Robert Jones. The 1798 tour was not as extensive, but in traveling from the scene described in *Tintern Abbey* to Bristol a portion of the 1793 journey is reversed. It was in Bristol that the poem was first written down, so from the beginning of the poem to its final transcription Wordsworth moved in the

direction of Salisbury Plain, although significantly there would be no return to Sarum. As he composes *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth knows that he will be moving toward the site of his encounter with the Real in the near future, and this thought—along with the crucial presence of Dorothy—is behind much of the sublime energy of the poem, and especially behind the structuring of the egotistical sublime as it is elaborated in the second part of paragraph two of the poem.

> Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world
> Is lighten'd:—that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (36-50)

Lines 36 to 50 of *Tintern Abbey* are the first expression of the egotistical sublime in Wordsworth's poetry. As with the "sensations sweet" earlier in the paragraph, the sublime is connected to the beautiful forms of the Wye with the ambiguous "owed," an ambiguity intensified with "may have." There is no clear cause and effect, no statement that the recollection of the natural imagery is immediately succeeded by a sublime insight; instead we are told that there *may* be a connection. My belief that the Real sublime is the cause of the egotistical sublime—ultimately its first phase—will make my reading of this rhetorical choice rather obvious: Wordsworth expresses doubts about the causal connection between the Wye valley and his sublime response because it does not in fact exist.

Interestingly, no such doubts are immediately voiced about the objective existence of the egotistical sublime. The weight of the world is

lightened, the affections lead us on, we are laid asleep, and none of this is qualified by "perhaps." So, it seems, the egotistical sublime *does* happen; Wordsworth just cannot be certain what occasions it. There is obviously nothing of the menacing natural sublime in this description: we might here profitably recall Burke's statement that in the sublime "the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other," and that the sublime "hurries us on by an irresistible force" (53). In both major eighteenth century sublime theorists, it is difficult to imagine a context in which there could be confusion about what was causing the sublime; it is the nature of the traditional sublime, in its power and/or immensity, to be unmistakable, unavoidable. Wordsworth's sublime is a mood, and the origins of moods are mysterious rather than obvious. It is not even a bad mood, but instead a "blessed" one in which metaphysical insight is gained without the defeat of the imagination required in the Kantian model.

Nevertheless, the parallel is stronger here with the third *Critique* than with the *Enquiry*: as with Kant, the sublime is associated with a movement from the senses to the supersensible ("we are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul"). But there is no sense of being overwhelmed by external reality, no "momentary inhibition of the vital forces" (*Critique* 98). As Weiskel notes in his analysis of the egotistical sublime, for Wordsworth the world outside the subject signifies too little rather than too much, and the mind "fills up the absence created by pure subjectivity" (143). In this version of transcendence, instead of the self being threatened with inundation the mind penetrates into the inmost recesses of external being: "We see into the life of things." Wordsworth's phrasing here is vague enough to suggest that the substance of this second sight is difficult to put into words; in my reading this is consistent with the fact that this description screens the recollection of an encounter with the non-Symbolic, traumatic Real. The relationship between trauma and poetry is relatively straightforward here: Wordsworth is menaced by the Real sublime of 1793, and the composition of *Tintern Abbey* is his Symbolic response (the recovery phase of the Real sublime); one 1793 memory substitutes for another, and the repressed trauma returns as the nonthreatening egotistical sublime.

Though the structure of the egotistical sublime is partly based on eighteenth century notions of sublimity, the specific imagery of

transcendence in *Tintern Abbey* owes much, unsurprisingly, to *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. It will be recalled that when the earlier work's Wordsworth-figure, the Sailor, encounters the Real the resultant symptom is a trance. When this character sees the gibbeted figure that represents his future self, it is a moment of intense trauma more suggestive of the traditional sublime than is anything in *Tintern Abbey*:

> It was a spectacle which none might view
> In spot so savage but with shuddering pain
> Nor only did for him at once renew
> All he had feared from man, but rouzed a train
> Of the mind's phantoms, horrible as vain.
> The stones, as if to sweep him from the day,
> Roll'd at his back along the living plain;
> He fell and without sense or motion lay,
> And when the trance was gone, feebly pursued his way. (118-26)

Reading the second half of paragraph two of *Tintern Abbey* as a repressive rewriting of this stanza is revealing. The natural world of Salisbury Plain—in the form of the rolling rocks—is seen as a physical threat to the Sailor, and of course Wordsworth is not similarly menaced at the Wye. The Sailor must confront the "horrible" mind's phantoms, while Wordsworth is "gently" led to transcendence by the affections. The loss of sense in the first poem is violent, physically knocking the character from his feet; at the Wye Wordsworth is "laid asleep" in body. The Sailor is enfeebled by his experience, and we do not learn what the experience was like for him; Wordsworth sees into the life of things (a phrasing as vague as it is eloquent), and is invigorated, renovated. In the egotistical sublime as posited in *1798*, the Real sublime is transformed into everything it is not, into everything Wordsworth desires it to be.

Paragraph three of *Tintern Abbey* is brief, and requires little comment on my part:

> If this
> Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
> In darkness, and amid the many shapes
> Of joyless day-light; when the fretful stir

Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
O sylvan Wye! Thou wanderer through the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee! (50-58)

As poetry, this is as lovely as the remainder of *Tintern Abbey*. As a comment on the poet's state of mind, it is fairly straightforward: even if I am wrong about the emotional significance I have attached to the Wye valley, still, I have thought of the place often. It seems that this statement is included as a corrective to the confidence with which the egotistical sublime is described in paragraph two. Room is (characteristically, in this poem) left for interpretation, however: does the "this" of line fifty tell us that the egotistical sublime itself is a vain belief, or rather its connection with the Wye valley? In the end, the answer to this question is not terribly important. The primary effect of this paragraph is to intensify the mood of doubt that has been this poem's sustaining atmosphere from the very beginning. This will be taken further still in *Tintern Abbey*'s final two paragraphs, as Wordsworth provides a thoroughly unconvincing picture of the emotional growth he claims to have sustained since 1793. The icon for his doubt in the poem's conclusion will be his sister Dorothy, present at the second visit to the Wye but not mentioned until the final paragraph. Dorothy, a year and a half younger than William but described as a child, will provide a kind of Real truth to her brother's Symbolic fiction.

Dorothy as the Threat of the Real: Dissonance In Paragraphs Four and Five

And now, with gleams of half-extinguish'd thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. (59-66)

It is only in paragraph four of *Tintern Abbey* that Wordsworth describes in detail the differences between his 1793 and 1798 selves. Here we are given the first model of the growth of the poet's mind, a model which is unworkable, as Wordsworth himself would soon come to realize. As with the "patient" in Freud's paper on screen memories, Wordsworth knows that there is something not quite right about the recollection of 1793. To make the memory more plausible, Wordsworth here gives an elaborate description of the kind of self that would have formed such a memory, and made the sort of use of it that he later did.

After spending much of the poem discussing the recurrence of the memory over the five years that succeeded its formation, Wordsworth at the beginning of the fourth paragraph finally describes the memory of the scene happening *at* the scene in the present ("The picture of the mind revives again"). This is described with all the doubt we would expect given the movement of the first three paragraphs: the thought is half-extinguished, the recognitions dim and faint. It is intriguing that Wordsworth describes the creation of a new memory in 1798, which will provide his future existence with "life and food." This is the first real suggestion in the poem that the second trip to the Wye is *necessary*. The life and food associated with the first visit apparently only last for five years, and then the poet's stocks need to be replenished. Given that the benefits of the egotistical sublime are associated with Wordsworth's memory of the place, this is curious. If he does not forget the first visit (and there is no suggestion he is concerned about this), why is a second visit necessary? This passage, seemingly assertive, reveals doubts about the egotistical sublime. It is almost as if Wordsworth needs reassurance, as if the second tour of the Wye valley is necessary to confirm the meaning of the first. If so, the qualifications Wordsworth makes to his assertions throughout *Tintern Abbey* show that in this sense the 1798 visit to the Wye is a failure.

> And so I dare to hope
> Though changed, no doubt, from what I was, when first
> I came among these hills; when like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
> Wherever nature led; more like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads, than one

Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by,)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite: a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. (66-84)

Wordsworth's description of his 1793 self is astounding, if one considers that he was twenty-three when he first came to the Wye. If this characterization were to be summed up with a single adjective, we might select "thoughtless." After comparing his younger self to a roe, he says that in 1793 nature was "all in all," that his love for the natural world did not need "any interest / Unborrowed from the eye." Assuming this to be true, it will be obvious that an experience of the egotistical sublime would not have been possible during Wordsworth's first visit to the Wye valley. Indeed, nowhere in the poem is it suggested that such a moment of transcendence happened in 1793. The "gift" of sublimity apparently occurred at some unspecified time in the following five years. Wordsworth's account suggests that he sees his youthful self as presided over by a primal unity with nature. As a twenty-three year old Wordsworth did not need to think: the senses were enough, and that which was unborrowed from the eye was *superfluous*.

Such a liberty from thought and its more troubling consequences is not something we would normally associate with a young adult. Screen memories coincide with repression, and it is easy to feel that there is something not quite right about this portrait of young adulthood. Biographically, of course, we know that 1793 was one of the most troubled times in Wordsworth's life. With concerns about England's war with France, an abandoned lover who has given birth to his child, now seven months old (whom he will be unable to meet for a decade because of the war), and a profound anxiety about how to

support himself, it is impossible to endorse his notion that nature was "all in all."

Indeed, one does not need to posit a 1793 experience of the Real sublime on Salisbury Plain to feel that this self-portrait is so much wishful thinking. We might here recall the Female Vagrant's description in *Salisbury Plain* of the first eighteen years of her life:

> "Light was my sleep; my days in transport rolled:
> With thoughtless joy I stretched along the shore
> My parent's nets, or watched, when from the fold
> High o'er the cliffs I fed his fleecy store,
> A dizzy depth below! his boat and twinkling oar." (230-34)

The Female Vagrant's story is her Symbolic defense against the Real, and it is ultimately a flimsy one: she directly contradicts her own account of undisturbed happiness until adulthood. Beyond the fact that it is implausible that a twenty-three year old (especially one with Wordsworth's experiences) would be as the poet describes his younger self, there is much in paragraph four of *Tintern Abbey* to make us doubt this story. There is of course the famous "I cannot paint / What then I was," which has the quality of a confession, and makes one ask why he is bothering to try. Then there is the characterization of himself as being "like a man / Flying from something that he dreads." In my reading, of course, the phrasing here is revealing: Wordsworth came to the Wye valley from Salisbury Plain. Even if one does not subscribe to my interpretation, this description seems at odds with the notion of having a primal bond with nature.

Perhaps most disruptive to this vision of Wordsworth's 1793 self is the hasty, parenthetical remark that the "coarser pleasures" of childhood had in 1793 given way to the feeling of oneness with the natural world. Why this brief reference to childhood? In what sense are the pleasures of childhood "coarser" than those of 1793? Presumably as a young adult Wordsworth was more sophisticated, but the language of paragraph four leaves this unclear. If in his early twenties nature was all in all, and his feeling for nature needed nothing unborrowed from the eye, we must wonder if this represents a more evolved position after all. In any case, we are left to speculate what makes the joys of childhood coarser; the poetry simply does not tell us.

I believe the reference to boyish days arises out of an unconscious dissatisfaction with the portrait of the 1793 self. The sort of wholeness of self assigned to the age of twenty-three more accurately belongs to very early childhood. To make these attributes more tenable for a young adult, Wordsworth explicitly distinguishes them from those of childhood. The shakiness of this enterprise may be seen in the fact that Wordsworth limits his discussion of childhood to two consummately vague lines, buried in parentheses. This brief allusion to childhood is one reason among many that Wordsworth's portrait of 1793 fails to convince. Early childhood represents one's initiation into the Symbolic order, and given what we learned about Wordsworth's use of language in the Salisbury Plain poems, it is unsurprising that this is a point in his development that he would want to gloss over. Wordsworth sets up a dichotomy between innocence and experience, sensation and thought, simplicity and sophistication. In itself there is nothing obviously wrong with this opposition, but his decision to describe these poles as belonging to 1793 and 1798 is problematic, and the inevitable tension associated with the schema spills over into the nearly useless comment on childhood. It is my belief that the discussion of the growth of the poet's mind offered in *Tintern Abbey* will drive Wordsworth to a more plausible model of this phenomenon in *The Prelude*, a model which will include a more realistic (and, obviously, more detailed) discussion of the nature of childhood.

> —That time is past,
> And all its aching joys are now no more,
> And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur: other gifts
> Have followed, for such loss, I would believe,
> Abundant recompense. For I have learned
> To look on nature, not as in the hour
> Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
> The still, sad music of humanity,
> Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power
> To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (84-112)

In this emotional economy, we have to give up something to gain something. What has been lost is thoughtless joy, the freedom to bound over the mountains like a roe; what has been gained is the egotistical sublime, the ability to pierce the surface of reality to find a "something" which is far more deeply interfused. As with the parallel discussion in paragraph two, we do not find out in any meaningful detail what the spoils of the egotistical sublime actually are. The Wordsworth of 1798 has lost, and this loss is tremendous, but the insights associated with the egotistical sublime are an "abundant recompense." "Aching joys" have been traded for "the joy / Of elevated thoughts." Wordsworth is not able to deny that he has lost a primal unity (though he claims this happens much later than it actually does), but the nature of the screen memory allows him to hope ("I would believe") that this loss is part of a larger gain, a necessary step to adult spiritual wholeness. At this point the relationship between the Symbolic and the Real in and around *Tintern Abbey* may be spelled out quite explicitly:

Symbolic Level: (composition of poem, screen memory)	boyish days, coarser pleasures (?)	→	1793: unity, nature all in all	→	1798: unity lost, egotistical sublime gained
Real Level: (organizing structure of poem)	early childhood, preSymbolic unity with mother	→	1793: encounter with Real on Salisbury Plain	→	1798: reminder of 1793, no gain, only loss

According to Wordsworth's myth of memory as articulated in *Tintern Abbey*, the decisive formation of the poet's adult personality happens at some unspecified time between 1793 and 1798 (and again it is important to recall that nowhere in the poem does Wordsworth describe the point where his sublime insights began). Such an unbelievable fiction is necessary because of the devastating impact the Real sublime had on him in 1793. In 1798, as in the immediate aftermath of the Salisbury Plain encounter, the response is the composition of poetry; *Tintern Abbey* is more sophisticated and assured than the Salisbury Plain poems, but it is not therefore less desperate. Wordsworth's construction of the egotistical sublime is as fragile as it is brilliant. Throughout this great poem we have seen Wordsworth casting doubts on his assertions as soon as they are made, and paragraph four is no exception, as he describes perception as a blend of receptivity and creativity: "all the mighty world / Of eye and ear, both what they half-create, / And what perceive." It will be recalled that this phrasing echoes that of the Derwent fragment written a year earlier. We can not know with any certainty when the notion of the egotistical sublime first presented itself to Wordsworth, but it seems from the very start to have brought with it doubts about its authenticity. Wordsworth is insecure about the assertions he makes in *Tintern Abbey*, and it is admirable that these insecurities find their way into the poem. He needs to use the egotistical sublime as his ladder to transcendence, but the fact that it is grounded in the rag and bone shop of the heart exerts a subtle pressure on the poet, with the result that there is something not quite right about the memory of 1793. The radical inaccuracy of Wordsworth's self-portrait will eventually be distilled into a more

sophisticated notion of psychic evolution on *The Prelude*. This inaccuracy takes a physical form in paragraph five, with the revelation that the poet's sister Dorothy has been with him all along.

> Nor, perchance,
> If I were not thus taught, should I the more
> Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
> For thou art with me, here, upon the banks
> Of this fair river; thou, my dearest Friend,
> My dear, dear Friend, and in thy voice I catch
> The language of my former heart, and read
> My former pleasures in the shooting lights
> Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
> May I behold in thee what I was once,
> My dear, dear Sister! And this prayer I make,
> Knowing that Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy: for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our chearful faith that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings. (112-35)

Thanks to the elaborate discussion in paragraph four of Wordsworth's spiritual evolution, this description of Dorothy does not require much of a gloss. Critics have rightly paid close attention to the "childlike" characterization of the poet's sister, who was in fact twenty-six when *Tintern Abbey* was composed. John Barrell has perhaps been the recent critic most protective of Dorothy, analyzing the ways Wordsworth belittles his sibling for the seeming purpose of aggrandizing the self. Such readings of paragraph five do not give paragraph four its due attention: the "wild ecstasies" which Wordsworth sees as a part of

Dorothy's personality in 1798 are the same he associates with his past self of 1793. Rather than a need to keep his sister in a subordinate position, his characterization of Dorothy reflects the pressure he feels to be consistent with the model of the mind's growth he posited in paragraph four. Not Dorothy but rather the Real must be kept down.

Wordsworth was a creature of sensation in 1793, and in 1798 he is a creature of thought (and thus susceptible of the egotistical sublime), but the poetry does not make it clear at what point on the timeline he changes. All in all, paralleling the mental states of a twenty-three year-old and a twenty-six year-old does not suggest condescension on Wordsworth's part. Wordsworth does not describe Dorothy as having any inherent limitations which will prevent her from acquiring the level of sophistication he has; indeed he says explicitly that she will be able to experience the egotistical sublime:

> and in after years,
> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
> Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
> Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms... (138-41)

Barrell is suspicious of this phrasing, and feels Wordsworth is tempted to see Dorothy in her "innocent" state indefinitely: "How long a time is implied in the phrase 'after years' is not clear, but more, it seems, than the one-and-a-half years by which Dorothy was William's junior" (161). This is not in my opinion supported by the poetry. In fact Wordsworth clearly states that Dorothy's innocence will be fleeting: "Oh! yet a little while / May I behold in thee what I was once, / My dear, dear Sister!"

In isolation, Wordsworth's treatment of Dorothy here may seem patronizing; in the context of what he has said about his own past, it makes sense. It is intriguing that the criticism has been more interested in the inconsistencies of Dorothy's portrait than in the same problems as they apply to the Wordsworth of 1793. Perhaps this is because the precise dating of the poem forces us to imagine Dorothy as she must have been around July 13, 1798, while with Wordsworth's earlier self we can make allowances for the vagaries of memory. It is only after more than a hundred lines of blank verse, meditative—a passage which could just as easily be thought as speech—that we discover that *Tintern Abbey* is in fact a dramatic monologue. If one were to recall a first

reading of this work (which I cannot), I would have to imagine the sudden identification of Dorothy as audience a jolt. With the self-portrait of 1793, it is easy to not notice, if we do not read closely, that the person who "had no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied, or any interest / Unborrowed from the eye" was in fact a young adult. Dorothy's adulthood, conversely, is unavoidable for the reader, if we assume *any* familiarity with the biographical material.

William H. Galperin sees the presence of Dorothy as "a dissociative force, who returns both the poet and the reader to the present: to a 'dreary' world bounded by a forgotten past and an uncertain future. To take her to heart would necessitate a change in identity, or involve a shift in emphasis from wish to fulfillment" (83). Dorothy brings her brother back to reality, like it or not. If we recognize in the egotistical sublime, and in Wordsworth's description of his earlier self, a Symbolic construction *par excellence*, then it is not difficult to see Dorothy as she was in July of 1798 as the threat of the Real, a twenty-six year-old adult giving the lie to her brother's theory of human development, to his will to see his 1793 self as a child.

It will be remembered that the Real is often that around which our Symbolic defenses are organized. It is my belief that the true occasion for the composition of *Tintern Abbey* is the presence of Dorothy during the 1798 tour. We can here offer an alternate version of Wordsworth's timeline: After his traumatic experience on Salisbury Plain in 1793, Wordsworth comes to the Wye valley, and is struck by its nonsublime beauty, perfectly suited for what will become his own version of transcendence. During the following five years, when he is periodically menaced by the recollection of the Real, he recovers through the screen memory of the Wye. For this memory to function properly as a defense, Wordsworth needs to see his 1793 self as a child, as being too innocent, too whole, to be susceptible of the terrors associated with the Real. Returning to the Wye in 1798, the picture of the mind revives again, but there is an important difference from the first visit: Dorothy is with him, and in her recalcitrant biology, in her undeniable adulthood, she casts doubts on the validity of the screen memory, making it an unreliable defense.

Wordsworth's response to this new threat of the Real is to compose *Tintern Abbey*, his most elaborate Symbolic defense to date. To make his childlike image of himself in 1793 more plausible, and to

account for his sister, he spontaneously develops a relatively complex theory of emotional growth, and ties the egotistical sublime to it by suggesting that it is only when we reach a particular level of development that we are ready for transcendence. As a Symbolic defense—and certainly as poetry—*Tintern Abbey* is a stunning success, but the inconsistencies of the theory are inevitably written into the poem, and their icon is Dorothy. Just as the scabs in the dream of Irma's injection are stripped of some of their terror when included in a narrative, the language of *Tintern Abbey* strives to weave Dorothy into the Symbolic fabric of the poet's story; but this prevents neither the scabs nor Dorothy from being disruptive to the tale that is told. This can be seen in the critical response to the description of Dorothy, in our sense—ours and Wordsworth's—that something is not quite right. Our response is to write criticism; Wordsworth's will be to write other poems, ultimately *The Prelude*.

> Therefore let the moon
> Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
> And let the misty mountain winds be free
> To blow against thee: and in after years,
> When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
> Into a sober pleasure, when thy mind
> Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
> Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
> For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,
> If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
> Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
> And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance,
> If I should be, where I no more can hear
> Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
> Of past existence, wilt thou then forget
> That on the banks of this delightful stream
> We stood together; and that I, so long
> A worshipper of Nature, hither came,
> Unwearied in that service: rather say
> With warmer love, oh! with far deeper zeal
> Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,

That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake. (135-60)

The conclusion of the poem is intended as a tender statement of love from brother to sister, and certainly it is that. But this portion of the poem is not free of the doubts that have dominated the earlier sections. At this point the doubts become explicitly about the future, and relate to the possibility that Wordsworth and Dorothy will be separated. The circumstances in which this would happen are not spelled out in the poem, but one gets the feeling that Wordsworth is talking about his death. Ironically he seems to be trying to write himself into the landscape, to make himself a part of the natural world that will occasion Dorothy's own future experience of the egotistical sublime: "with what healing thoughts / Of tender joy wilt thou remember me, / And these my exhortations!" *Tintern Abbey*, it seems, will be Dorothy's version of the Wye valley. We might wonder why the immediate experience of the sublime scenery will not suffice, but perhaps this is not very important; the comment is made in passing, and the ultimate reason for *Tintern Abbey*'s composition is William's psychic wellbeing and not his sister's.

New Historicism could provide an interesting critique of this apparent drive on Wordsworth's part to regress into the natural environment. From my perspective this reflects a desire on Wordsworth's part to trade consciousness and its torments for the placidity of nature; perhaps this is not so different from being laid asleep in body. Geoffrey H. Hartman provides an interesting comment on the conclusion of the poem, seeing the poet as desiring to become the spirit of the Wye valley. Speaking to Dorothy, "he speaks as if he were one of the dead who exhort the living in the guise of the genius loci" (*Unremarkable Wordsworth* 42). One thinks here of Žižek's characterization of Antigone as a sublime figure, Symbolically dead while still physically alive. Toward the conclusion of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, Wordsworth's Sailor takes on this sort of sublimity as he comes to take responsibility for his crime. This character's statement to the family of the abused child, the voice of the doomed, may here be compared to Wordsworth's exhortations to Dorothy:

"'Tis a bad world, and hard is the world's law;
Each prowls to strip his brother of his fleece;
Much need have ye that time more closely draw
The bond of nature, all unkindness cease,
And that among so few there still be peace:
Else can ye hope but with such num'rous foes
Your pains shall ever with your years increase."
While his pale lips these homely truths disclose,
A correspondent calm stole gently on his woes. (658-66)

The Sailor's statement is authoritative: he understands the world because he is no longer truly a part of it, no longer a bone of contention, in Nietzsche's phrase (474).

Wordsworth strives for the same sort of authority in the conclusion of *Tintern Abbey*. It does not work, and this is because Wordsworth is not a sublime figure; if he were, his encounter with the Real would not be repressed, and there would be no need to compose the poem. The Sailor's sublimity is grounded in the certainty of his fate; the conclusion of *Tintern Abbey*, like the rest of the work, is carefully qualified by "if" and "perchance." Wordsworth's is the voice of one who *might* be doomed, as anyone might be (and indeed as everyone ultimately is), and the ambiguous nature of the future strips his exhortation of any possible sublimity. But another way of saying this is that Wordsworth's responses to the menace of the Real are those of a normal human being; as such responses go, the construction of the egotistical sublime is quite ingenious. The traumatic nature of Wordsworth's encounter with the Real sublime is successfully kept out of *Tintern Abbey*, and I believe this is aided and abetted by the nonsublime, comforting quality of the Wye landscape. But Wordsworth is not always at the Wye, and something of the terrors of Salisbury Plain is to be found in his trauma poetry, which makes its first appearance roughly contemporary with *Tintern Abbey*.

3. The Trauma Poems of 1798

Scene 1, October 1792: A young English poet in Revolutionary France, desperately short of funds, determines to return to his homeland to get the money he needs to provide for the Frenchwoman he intends to marry. He takes his leave of her at Orléans. She is seven and a half months pregnant.[7]

Scene 2, August 1802: The poet travels to Calais for a reunion with his former lover. For the first time, he meets his nine year old daughter, and makes arrangements to financially support her. He returns to England and marries.

When Wordsworth left Annette Vallon in the autumn of 1792, he could not have known – despite simmering tensions between the two countries – that war between France and England would be declared almost immediately upon his return home, or that the conflict would be of an extended duration, delaying his return to France by a decade. This forced separation was devastating for Wordsworth, but it should be said that it greatly simplified what was a very complicated situation. There were significant political differences in the relationship: Wordsworth at this stage passionately supported the Revolution, and Annette and her family were Royalists. Perhaps more importantly, Annette's Catholic parents were not enthusiastic about a marriage with a poor Protestant Englishman; and Wordsworth certainly knew he could expect a similar resistance at home (Johnston 302). Finally and most crucially, there is the question of how Wordsworth would have

[7] My discussion of Wordsworth's love affair with Annette Vallon is at all points indebted to Kenneth R. Johnston's *The Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy*, which offers an extremely detailed (and extremely readable) reconstruction of Wordsworth's adventures in France in 1792.

procured the funds he sought. In the poet's veiled confession in the Vaudracour and Julia episode of Book IX of 1805 *Prelude* (it would be removed from later versions of Wordsworth's autobiography and published as a separate poem), the matter is put thus:

> The lovers came
> To this resolve—with which they parted, pleased
> And confident—that Vaudracour should hie
> Back to his father's house, and there employ
> Means aptest to obtain a sum of gold,
> A final portion even, if that might be;
> Which done, together they could then take flight
> To some remote and solitary place
> Where they might live with no one to behold
> Their happiness, or to disturb their love. (645-54)

He might have been considering the long-dreaded taking of clerical orders (Johnston 316), or of getting some kind of advance on the debt owed to the Wordsworth family by the Earl of Lonsdale. The priesthood would certainly have proved uncongenial, and Wordsworth would not see any of the Lonsdale money until the death of the Earl in 1802. In reality, he would be in grim financial straits until 1795, when Raisley Calvert would bequeath him nine hundred pounds; so even without the war as a barrier to crossing the Channel there was little Wordsworth would be able to do for his daughter immediately after her birth.

What were Wordsworth's feelings about his extended separation from Annette and their child? Over the course of his career, the poet wrote thousands of lines of autobiographical verse, and the subject of his French family is almost never broached—and then only in a carefully veiled form, as in the Vaudracour and Julia episode and the famous "Beauteous Evening" sonnet. A poem like *Tintern Abbey* becomes eloquent in its silence on these matters. At the time when Wordsworth first came to the Wye valley in July of 1793, he claims that nature "To me was all in all"; this despite the fact that he had an infant daughter he had never met, and had no prospect of meeting in the immediate future. If Wordsworth's poetry has anything to tell us about

his French family, we must be prepared to read between the lines, to be sensitive to the subtle voice of repression.

I argued in chapter one that in the summer of 1793, on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth had a traumatic experience of the Lacanian Real, and that it was this sublime trauma around which the poetry of the Great Decade came to be organized, starting with *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. The protagonist of this work, identified only as a Sailor, clearly is intended to represent the poet, and the nature of his adventures suggests a compulsion on Wordsworth's part to confess guilty feelings relating to Annette Vallon. I postulated that the thought of Annette's pregnancy came to be associated in the poet's mind with his Real encounter. Wordsworth's experience of the Real was no doubt singular and specific to a moment on Sarum in 1793—a moment that likely has no direct connection to Annette Vallon—but in transforming this encounter into poetry he clearly connected the Real to the punishment of a criminal whose crime is (at least partially) the abandonment of his lover.

The Sailor in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* commits a murder and becomes a wanderer. As a result of this, his wife and children are driven from their home and become poverty-stricken. The actions of the Sailor reflect Wordsworth's need to confess his guilt at having abandoned his lover and their unborn child. At the same time, Wordsworth's protagonist is presented throughout the narrative as a kind and considerate man, reflecting a Godwinian notion that good people can be driven by circumstance to bad actions. The Sailor's encounter with the Real happens when he comes upon a gibbeted figure, which he sees as his future self. As a confession of Wordsworth's own guilty feelings, there is something a bit melodramatic about this: in revealing his feelings about having left Annette behind, he sees himself as a criminal, and only an execution can set things right. Despite (or because of) all this guilt, the poem is about the Sailor and not his family. The character's dying wife appears at the end of the poem, but this is brief and anticlimactic with regard to the Sailor's coming to terms with his actions. Despite Annette's presence in the background, pregnancy is not an important issue in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*.

In the years immediately following the expression of the Real sublime in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, two new kinds of poems

appear, as the painful insights of this early work are repressed in different ways. Firstly, there is the poetry of the egotistical sublime, the first example of which is *Tintern Abbey.* In this type of poetry what might be described as the violent and traumatic transcendence of language by the Real sublime is reinterpreted as a gentle transcendence of the phenomenal world. Transcendence is the quality *Tintern Abbey* has in common with *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*: the traumatic element has been repressed, only to resurface in what I refer to as trauma poetry. In trauma poetry a frightening encounter—reminiscent of the Sailor's experience at the gibbet—is detailed, and it is the sense of transcendence that is repressed. Wordsworth's first defense against his own experience of the Real had been the composition of the Salisbury Plain poems; when this proved inadequate the dangerous energy of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* was split into trauma poetry and the egotistical sublime.

The two most important trauma poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* years are *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*, and, with respect to Wordsworth's own biography, the crucial feature these poems share is a pregnant woman. In *Peter Bell* the title character is based on a wild rover Wordsworth met as he walked along the Wye in 1793, and with whom he identified. Much is made in the poem of this character's misdeeds. Among these we are told of one of Peter's twelve marriages, to a "sweet and playful Highland girl" (938). After they are married and she becomes pregnant, she comes to realize her husband's lawless ways, and is horrified. She names the child within her womb "Benoni, or the child of sorrow" (959), and dies of a broken heart before the child can be born. In *The Thorn*, of course, Martha Ray's pregnancy is central. Martha is engaged to Stephen Hill ("Peter Bell" and this name are probably unconscious echoes of one another), but he abandons her for another woman. Pregnant and alone, she is driven mad by her sorrow. It is not clear what happens to the child, but the implication is that she kills it.

Unlike the protagonist of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, neither Peter Bell's nor Stephen Hill's actions are excused by Godwinian situational ethics. These characters are not good men overtaken by circumstance. In both cases, though, it is interesting to note that the Wordsworth figure is not directly responsible for the infant's death. We can judge Peter Bell for misleading the Highland girl about his true

nature, but it is *her* death (of a broken heart, caused by Peter, to be sure) that dooms Benoni. Stephen Hill is heartless to abandon Martha Ray, but if the baby dies it is at her hands and not his. Though the male characters in these works do not have the virtues of the Sailor, they are not directly responsible for the deaths of the children. If this is related to Wordsworth's own situation, we see—as in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*—a need to confess as well as a powerful desire to be exonerated on all charges. In these works written more than five years after he last saw Annette Vallon, Wordsworth's feelings about their parting are clearly still terribly conflicted.

We might here imagine Wordsworth at Orléans in late October 1792, as he prepared to leave his very pregnant lover for what he hoped would be a short time. We picture Wordsworth turning away, knowing that he will not be present for the birth (he has already made arrangements with a Vallon family friend to stand in for him as father at the baptism (Johnston 316)), turning to look at Annette one more time, thinking of the child growing inside her. Will it be male or female? How will he provide for it? Will he and Annette be allowed to marry? Where will the family live? Will Annette and the child make it through the delivery in good health? Lacan often speaks of the Real as a trauma that disrupts and reorganizes one's day-to-day existence. In this sense, it becomes easy to see how the horribly uncertain leave-taking at Orléans might become associated in Wordsworth's mind with his Real encounter on Salisbury Plain. Something of the bewilderment in the face of Annette's pregnancy and the couple's forced separation is echoed in the *Thorn* narrator's comments on the outcome of Martha Ray's pregnancy:

> No more I know, I wish I did,
> And I would tell it all to you;
> For what became of this poor child
> There's none that ever knew:
> And if a child was born or no,
> There's no one that could ever tell;
> And if 'twas born alive or dead,
> There's no one knows, as I have said... (155-62)

Of course Wordsworth and Annette Vallon were in communication with one another during the 1790s (Johnston 296), and he soon found out that Caroline, a healthy daughter, had been born. But when we consider that sad moment of parting at Orléans, with the future so uncertain, the *Thorn* narrator's interpretive difficulties provide a reasonable fictional translation of this painful energy.

Despite this, the male characters in these two poems do not, as the Sailor does in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* directly confront the Real. We need only consider the nonrepresentation of pregnancy to see that powerful strategies of avoidance structure trauma poetry. The death of *Peter Bell*'s Highland girl has happened at some unspecified time in the past, and she does not make an appearance in the poem (other than as a spectral image in Part Three haunting Peter's guilty conscience). In *The Thorn* Martha Ray is never seen (though the narrator describes having encountered her), and the events relating to her pregnancy are more than twenty years in the past. Though Wordsworth is compelled to confess his guilty feelings, the representation of the Real sublime in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* has been extremely painful for the poet, and he unconsciously distances actual pregnancy. In *Peter Bell* the mistreatment of the Highland girl is seen as one crime among many, and the reader's attention is carefully focused by Wordsworth on Peter's savage and cruel beating of an animal. In *The Thorn,* a poem we might say is "about" pregnancy, the relevant events are relegated to the distant past. Wordsworth is taking no chances.

In *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* the Real sublime happens when the Sailor comes upon the gibbet. In seeing the dead criminal, whom he identifies with his own future self, he is thrown back upon his biological life force or Real, with important consequences for his immediate future as well as Wordsworth's. In *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn* similar encounters are described, but in such a way that they fail to be experiences of the Real. The Sailor experiences the Real because he sees the dead man as his double. Peter Bell also comes upon a dead body, but his failure to identify with it is decisive, turning what might have been a work of accountability into one of redemption. In *The Thorn,* the experience of the Real is even more decisively foreclosed. A rumor suggests that Martha Ray drowned her newborn child, and it is said

that if one goes to the pond where this crime was committed, and looks steadily at the surface of the water,

> The shadow of a babe you trace,
> A baby and a baby's face,
> And that it looks at you... (227-29)

Would such an encounter be with the Real? For Martha Ray it might be: we can imagine the image of her murdered child, the icon of her crime, serving the same function for her that the gibbet does for the Sailor. For anyone else, though, seeing the child beneath the water—while certainly horrifying—would likely be more suggestive of the Gothic than of the Real. (As we saw in chapter one, Wordsworth often selects the Gothic as a less menacing Symbolic alternative to the Real.) More importantly, this encounter is purely hypothetical, the stuff of rumor. Stories—the material of the Symbolic—again keep the Real at a safe distance. One can talk about the pond without suffering any of the ill effects that might be associated with it; one can remain an outsider to the trauma. The danger, if there is one, is to be found in going to the pond and having a look for oneself. *The Thorn*'s narrator encourages his interlocutor to do just this, but any such encounter is safely beyond the confines of the poem.

In both *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*, the encounter with what I will call the not-quite-Real involves the surface of a body of water. This will also be importantly true in the later *Resolution and Independence* and elsewhere. The inherent ambiguity of a water's surface is perfectly suited to Wordsworth's emotional needs in this kind of poetry. For the Sailor in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, there is no mediation in the encounter with the Real—nothing between the character and the gibbet—and the result is a devastating trance. But the Real, or, more properly speaking, that which might have been the Real, is *submerged* in these trauma poems. We might think here of the comforting Wye valley, and the way the indistinctness of its individual features contributes to the poet's soothing notion of the egotistical sublime. When the characters in *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn* look upon a body of water, things are at first similarly ambiguous. One must gaze steadily upon the pond in *The Thorn* for the image of the baby to appear; the narrator has looked at it closely enough to measure it—"'Tis three feet

long, and two feet wide" (33)—and has not seen an apparition. When Peter Bell first sees what turns out to be a dead body in the river Swale, he is not immediately sure what he is looking at, and a bewildering array of possibilities runs through his head before the image coalesces into its true form.

Throughout Wordsworth's career, gazing upon a body of water is a source of rich metaphors for interpretive difficulty, culminating in an amazing passage on the limits of autobiography in Book IV of *The Prelude*:

> As one who hangs down-bending from the side
> Of a slow-moving boat, upon the breast
> Of a still water, solacing himself
> With such discoveries as his eye can make
> Beneath him in the bottom of the deep,
> Sees many beauteous sights—weeds, fishes, flowers,
> Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,
> Yet often is perplexed, and cannot part
> The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
> Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth
> Of the clear flood, from things which there abide
> In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam
> Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,
> And wavering motions sent he knows not whence,
> Impediments that make his task more sweet;
> Such pleasant office have we long pursued
> Incumbent o'er the surface of past time
> With like success, nor often have appeared
> Shapes fairer or less doubtfully discerned
> Than these to which the Tale, indulgent Friend!
> Would now direct thy notice. (256-76)

This passage has far-reaching implications for Wordsworth's poetry. We think of the positing of the egotistical sublime in *Tintern Abbey*: the memories of 1793 are the items beneath the surface of the water—weeds, fishes, flowers, and so on. But the poet's ability to see these things is limited by the reflections of 1798, mountains and clouds, and most crucially "his own image," suggesting that the self can be an

impediment to accurately retrieving the past. This *Prelude* passage is an important gloss for *Tintern Abbey*'s famous "what they half-create, / And what perceive," and should be kept in mind whenever considering the function of screen memories in Wordsworth's verse. Submersion is a superb and obvious metaphor for repression, and in a Lacanian reading, stripped down to essentials, we would say that it is the Real that lurks below the surface of Wordsworth's stream of poetry, and that the various things above the water—the shadow of the self as egotistical sublime, for example—helpfully keep the lineaments of this trauma obscure and nonthreatening. The impediments make the task more sweet because it is a task Wordsworth would desperately like to avoid accomplishing.

In early trauma poetry, there is not a question of confounding present and past, because it is fiction and not memory that Wordsworth uses to protect himself. William Wordsworth is not Peter Bell (though he did compare himself to his character), and he is not the prospective gazer on *The Thorn*'s pond. This is not to say that the fictionalized nature of these works strips them of their ability to terrify: Peter Bell's encounter drives him into a trance not unlike that which befalls the Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, and the hair-raising Gothicism of a drowned baby staring back at one is not to be discounted. But these encounters, troubling though they certainly are, are not finally with the Real, and this is important to Wordsworth even if it does not immediately appear to be so within the structure of the poetry. The submerged baby in *The Thorn* might occasion an experience of the Real for those implicated in its death—for Martha Ray or the long-departed Stephen Hill—but not for the narrator, clearly depicted as an outsider to the trauma, or for anyone else. (Behind all this we must also recall that this entire narrative is fueled by rumor, that maybe there wasn't a child after all, a child that may or may not have been killed.) Unlike the Sailor's experience, the dead body that Peter Bell encounters does not lead to a Real moment: he neither identifies with the man himself, nor does he identify—despite his many crimes—with *having drowned anyone*.

I argued with respect to the Salisbury Plain poems that Wordsworth has simultaneously a need to confess his guilt for his treatment of Annette Vallon, and also to plead his innocence to the charges of wrongdoing leveled by his conscience. In this later trauma

poetry the tension is in the surface of the water, in the fluid border between Wordsworth's conscious and unconscious minds. In both of these poems the subject is brought to the edge of the water for an encounter which is at first obscure. Peter Bell does not immediately descry the object beneath the water, and in its immediate ambiguity (what if it is his version of the Sailor's gibbet, whatever that might be?) there is the threat that it will lead to an encounter with the Real. Finally, however, the Real is not discovered, and Wordsworth's protagonist is no more relieved than he is. Peter endures a lot in Wordsworth's tale of redemption, including even a trance, but his experiences though devastating are not of the Real, and he does not become a sublime figure. *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is about coming to terms with one's crimes, and accepting the fact that there is no future; *Peter Bell* is about being forgiven for one's crimes, and changing for the future. In *The Thorn* the encounter is hypothetical, a further remove from the Real.

The Real sublime as articulated in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is a kind of transcendence—of the Symbolic—which is traumatic. As I tried to illustrate with respect to *Tintern Abbey* in the previous chapter, in the egotistical sublime we find transcendence without trauma. In *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn* there are traumatic moments, but in which no transcendence (of the Symbolic or otherwise) finally occurs. These poems along with *Tintern Abbey* were written in the aftermath of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* and the egotistical sublime and trauma poetry are shaped by this primal poem. The energy of the Real is split along two very different evolutionary paths, as Wordsworth works conscientiously though unconsciously to shield himself from the emotions associated with a troubling early text. What is repressed in one type of poem is foregrounded in the other. Wordsworth is compelled to repeat, to return to the vicinity of his Real, but by the late 1790s his defenses have become sophisticated enough to make this return less menacing. The egotistical sublime and the trauma poems are mutually dependent, and that which is unspeakable in one is central to the other; in this way they serve as safety valves for each other. A further splitting may be seen in the relationship between *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*: the former is the story of a man who has mistreated his pregnant wife, the latter of an abandoned mother. In their different emphases these works show the distinct fictionalized halves of a relationship Wordsworth was feeling very guilty about in the 1790s.

Martha Ray was abandoned finally by Peter Bell, and the gulf between these two very different poems is not unlike the English Channel—or a war—in the separation it imposes.

Peter Bell and William Wordsworth: *Peter Bell*

> Now Peter do I call to mind
> That eventide when thou and I
> Over ditch and over stile
> Were fellow travellers many a mile
> Near Builth on the banks of Wye.
>
> Oh Peter who could now forget
> That both hung back in murderer's guize?
> 'Twas thou that wast afraid of me
> And I that was afraid of thee,
> We'd each of us a hundred eyes.
>
> -rejected lines from *Peter Bell*
> (qtd. in Moorman 1: 237-38)

Peter Bell was not published until 1819, and in his dedication to Robert Southey Wordsworth remarks with what seems a trace of embarrassment that the work was begun more than twenty years earlier in the summer of 1798. As with *Tintern Abbey*, the genealogy of this work actually goes back an additional five years. In late June of 1793 Wordsworth and his friend William Calvert had journeyed to the Isle of Wight, where with anguish the poet saw the fleet at Spithead preparing for war. At the end of July the friends headed to Salisbury Plain, where an accident with their carriage forced them to separate, Calvert riding away on his horse and leaving Wordsworth to continue his journey across Sarum on foot. At some point on Salisbury Plain Wordsworth had his traumatic encounter with the Real. After this he came to the Wye valley, the impressions of which would ostensibly structure the reflections of *Tintern Abbey*. At about this time he met the source for the title character of *Peter Bell*, according to the note he dictated to Isabella Fenwick:

> The countenance, gait, and figure of Peter, were taken from a wild rover with whom I walked from Builth, on the river Wye, downwards nearly as far as the town of Hay. He told me strange stories. It has always been a pleasure to me through life to catch at every opportunity that has occurred in my rambles of becoming acquainted with this class of people. (*Poetical Works* 2: 527)

There is something curious about this. Wordsworth's poem is a magnificent study of Peter Bell's psychology and emotional transformation; but who cares about his countenance, gait, and figure? Wordsworth's narrator does in fact physically describe his protagonist:

> A savage wildness round him hung
> As of a dweller out of doors;
> In his whole figure and his mien
> A savage character was seen,
> Of mountains and of dreary moors. (301-05)
>
> His face was keen as is the wind
> That cuts along the hawthorn fence;
> Of courage you saw little there,
> But, in its stead, a medley air
> Of cunning and of impudence.
>
> He had a dark and sidelong walk,
> And long and slouching was his gait;
> Beneath his looks so bare and bold,
> You might perceive, his spirit cold
> Was playing with some inward bait.
>
> His forehead wrinkled was and furr'd;
> A work one half of which was done
> By thinking of his *whens* and *hows*;
> And half by knitting of his brows
> Beneath the glaring sun.
>
> There was a hardness in his cheek,

There was a hardness in his eye,
As if the man had fix'd his face,
In many a solitary place,
Against the wind and open sky! (311-30)

This is relatively detailed, as Wordsworthian physical descriptions go, but one wonders if it is specific enough to be suggestive of a single person of the poet's acquaintance. Wordsworth no doubt met many similar characters in his rambles through the wilds of England; indeed the Fenwick note suggests as much. We must question whether it was purely this person's physiognomy and mannerisms which Wordsworth had in mind while composing *Peter Bell*. Was there something more to him, some character trait that fascinated Wordsworth?

Unfortunately, we must depend entirely on Wordsworth to answer this question, and he does not help us much. In terms of personality, the description of the real Peter Bell is restricted to "He told me strange stories"; while *Peter Bell* is manifestly a strange story, especially by Wordsworthian standards, we do not know what if any connection there is between his stories and Wordsworth's. In fact, in the Fenwick note Wordsworth explicitly claims several elements of his story (the Ass gazing in the water at its dead master, the number of Peter's wives, the tale of Benoni) as having sources unrelated to the original of Peter Bell. Parts of *Peter Bell* may in some way relate to the stories the rover told Wordsworth, but of course we will never know.

Of more interpretive use is the fact that Wordsworth apparently identified with Peter Bell—"Peter Bell" here referring to either the rover or the fictional character based upon him, or to both. Particularly intriguing though ambiguous are the rejected lines I quoted at the beginning of this section. Of course these lines are voiced by the poem's narrator and not Wordsworth, but perhaps in this instance the "village Milton" who tells the tale of Peter Bell may be said to speak for the poet. These two canceled stanzas indicate that Wordsworth was as troubling to Peter Bell as Peter was to Wordsworth. Mary Moorman suggests that Wordsworth's appearance may have troubled the rover because he had been wandering the countryside for weeks, and no longer looked the gentleman (1: 238). But Wordsworth says that "both hung back in murderer's guize," and I am not sure mere slovenliness suggests a murderer; and this would not explain the poet's cryptic

comment from 1831: "I am as much Peter Bell as ever" (5: 439). What being Peter Bell, much or little, means is not clear, but this connection was apparently a commonplace in Wordsworth's circle, and Hazlitt specifically compared Wordsworth's "gait" to that of Peter Bell (Beer, *Human Heart* 129).

This perhaps has not gotten us very far. The point I am trying to make is twofold: (1) that *Peter Bell*'s genesis has a great deal to do with a historical person Wordsworth met while walking along the Wye in 1793; and (2) that Wordsworth strongly (and lastingly) identified with this person. That Wordsworth tells us next to nothing about the source of Peter Bell limits what use we can make of this, but it is important for my purposes to situate this literary work begun in 1798 in the context of actual events in 1793. We can not help but be struck by the fact that the meeting with the rover was almost exactly contemporary with the impressions of the Wye that seemingly occasion *Tintern Abbey*, and that the two poems were begun within a few months of each other five years later. As I have said, poems of the egotistical sublime protect Wordsworth against the more dangerous undercurrents of trauma poetry, and vice versa; here, in the summer of 1793, in the Wye valley, we can see the point at which Wordsworth's poetic family tree necessarily split into two different but equally fruitful branches.

Peter Bell did not come from Wordsworth's pen as effortlessly as *Tintern Abbey*—he did not "finish" it for more than twenty years and then continued to revise it[8]—but it ultimately serves a similar protective function. We envision Wordsworth at the Wye looking at cottages green to the very door, and at roughly the same time meeting the rover on whom Peter Bell is based. The one experience was transcendent (eventually) for the poet, and the other traumatic (even in the canceled verses from *Peter Bell* this may be seen); behind both of these there is an immediately prior experience of the Real on Salisbury Plain which was both. Like the memory of the Wye greenery the recollection of the rover is a screen memory, but the fictionalized nature of *Peter Bell* (along with Wordsworth's autobiographical silence) prevents a detailed analysis of this phenomenon. *Tintern Abbey* manifestly shows that 1793 exerted a powerful influence of

[8] The Cornell Wordsworth edition of *Peter Bell* provides a detailed discussion of this poem's long and complicated history of composition.

Wordsworth five years later; the complicated publishing history of *Peter Bell* shows that this influence lasted for decades. Ground zero for Wordsworth's poetry is somewhere on Salisbury Plain in the summer of 1793; at some point this moment becomes related in the poet's mind with the leave-taking at Orléans, but the relationship between Orléans and Sarum will necessarily remain somewhat obscure.

Wordsworth identified with the rover he met at the Wye; though this appears to be in some way related to the encounter with the Real on Salisbury Plain, the textual evidence sheds little additional light on this. Perhaps this man told Wordsworth a strange story of having abandoned a pregnant lover, but of course this is speculation. As with the Wye scenery, Wordsworth evidently invested a tremendous amount of psychic energy in this man with whom he was acquainted for only a short time; unlike *Tintern Abbey*, we do not have numerous lines of blank verse to interrogate. "Peter Bell" is described in detail, but we do not know how this might relate to the man Wordsworth met.

In spite of whatever ways Wordsworth identified with the rover (or because of them), the poet in translating him into a fictional character sees him as decidedly non-"Wordsworthian." In *The Prelude* (and of course this has already been prefigured in *Tintern Abbey*), Wordsworth makes the argument that exposure to Nature has helped to make him a responsible moral agent. Cities are seen in Wordsworth as corrupting forces; he pities Coleridge for having spent his childhood "In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim" (*Frost at Midnight* 52), and is explicitly relieved that this has not been the case for himself. But Peter Bell has, like Wordsworth, spent a good deal of his life exposed to the "ministry" of Nature, without any of the beneficent effects that have been bestowed on the poet:

> Though Nature could not touch his heart
> By lovely forms and silent weather,
> And tender sounds, yet you might see
> At once that Peter Bell and she
> Had often been together.
>
> A savage wildness round him hung
> As of a dweller out of doors;
> In his whole figure and his mien

A savage character was seen,
Of mountains and of dreary moors.

To all the unshap'd half human thoughts
Which solitary Nature feeds
'Mid summer storms or winter's ice,
Had Peter joined whatever vice
The cruel city breeds. (296-310)

In Wordsworthian autobiography the influence of Nature shields one from the negative effects of "the din of towns and cities." A character like Peter Bell, it seems, can be corrupted by both country and city; what does this leave? The implications for *The Prelude*'s theories of human development (which find a rough draft in *Tintern Abbey*) are far-reaching, perhaps devastating. John Beer puts the matter succinctly, saying that the source for Peter Bell

> remained a crucial figure. He, after all, had been no victim of an urban civilisation, oppressed by the artificiality which life in such society laid upon its component members, but a man often exposed to the elements and the great forms of nature. Yet even if his experiences had made him an engaging character, full of 'strange stories', nature had not wrought in *him* the further connection with humanity created by affection for her tenderer manifestations. (*Human Heart* 124)

In the contemporary *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth's notion of the egotistical sublime had hinged on a movement from a thoughtless to a thoughtful appreciation of nature, a change that seems to occur sometime in one's twenties. But at the beginning of *Peter Bell*, Peter has no appreciation for nature at all:

A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more. (258-60)

An apt juxtaposition here would be with Wordsworth's worship of "the meanest flower that blows" (*Ode: Intimations of Immortality* 206). We can imagine Wordsworth thinking of this character as he composed *Tintern Abbey* (he had been working on *Peter Bell* for at least three months when he went to the Wye with his sister Dorothy). Could he be wrong in his assessment that Dorothy's mind will become a mansion for all lovely forms? Could he simply be wrong about the egotistical sublime in general? Even though *Peter Bell* protects Wordsworth from the more threatening elements of *Tintern Abbey*, it likewise undercuts the sublime assertions of the other poem. Wordsworth will solve the problems associated with Peter's personality with what he calls the Spirits of the Mind, but these will bring with them other problems.

If Wordsworth's relationship to Peter Bell (and the man behind him) is complicated, his relationship to the narrator of the poem is perhaps more complicated than it first seems. The meditative tone of *Tintern Abbey* makes it a surprise when the poet finally turns to Dorothy in paragraph five, and we discover that he is not alone. The narrator of *Peter Bell*, the "village Milton," is telling a story, and yet he is definitely *within* the poem, a part of the action. He travels throughout the solar system in his "little Boat" in the Prologue, before deciding (as we would expect of a Wordsworthian narrator) to return to the earth and tell an everyday story of everyday events. He goes to the stone table in his garden, where nine visitors await the story of Peter Bell. When he begins his story *in medias res*, they interrupt him:

> "Good Sir!" – the Vicar's voice exclaim'd,
> "You rush at once into the middle;"
> And little Bess, with accent sweeter,
> Cried, "O dear Sir! but who is Peter?"
> Said Stephen, – "'Tis a downright riddle!"
>
> The Squire said, "Sure as paradise
> "Was lost to man by Adam's sinning,
> "This leap is for us all too bold;
> "Who Peter was, let that be told,
> "And start from the beginning." (201-10)

The narrator complies with the demands of his audience, giving a lengthy discussion of Peter's character and history, some of which I have already quoted. If Dorothy had interrupted her brother after five lines with a demand that he start in 1793 and work his way forward, *Tintern Abbey* would be a very different poem. The narrator of *Peter Bell* is a character, and his command over the elements of his story is not perhaps what he might wish. Other elements of the poem reinforce this notion, including the occasional asides to the audience gathered around his table, which serve to interrupt the narrative flow. Not only are the village Milton and his audience seen distinctly as part of the same world, but the characters in the story he tells are similarly "real" and part of the same milieu. In the canceled lines quoted at the beginning of this section, the narrator claims to have met Peter; though these lines do not make it into the published versions of the poem, the narrator does, interestingly enough, *speak* to Peter throughout the tale:

> But first doth Peter deem it fit
> To spy about him far and near;
> There's not a single house in sight,
> No woodman's hut, no cottage light—
> Peter you need not fear! (416-20)

Later on in the story, the narrator suggests to the Spirits of the Mind that they work their witchery on Peter, advice that they apparently follow. Finally there is the narrator's statement at the end of the poem that he has many times personally seen the Ass that is so central to the story. The cumulative effect of these narrative moves is to blur conventional boundaries between poet, audience, and character: all three are part of the same world.

Thus the village Milton treads the line between storyteller and character. Just as "Peter Bell" is a fictionalized version of the rover Wordsworth met in 1793, so the narrator is a fictionalized version of Wordsworth himself. The Prologue of the poem, in which the narrator describes himself at length, is distinctly Wordsworthian in its emphases, and echoes the principles set out in the dedication to Southey. As Coleridge famously discusses in *Biographia Literaria*, the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* were to be written according to a division of labor: he was to give the supernatural the ring of truth, and

Wordsworth's job was to give everyday truth a supernatural charm of novelty. By 1798, Wordsworth knew full well that his talents did not lie with descriptions of the supernatural; his attempts at the Gothic in *Salisbury Plain* had no doubt done much to convince him of this. (Wordsworth, dismayed by certain negative reviews of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, lay much of the blame with the supernatural excesses of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*; the near-apology for the poem he attached to the 1800 edition did much to weaken the bonds of friendship between the two poets.)

As Wordsworth wrote his dedication to *Peter Bell* in 1819, this was all old news, and no one familiar with his verse would have been surprised by his statement that the work

> was composed under a belief that the Imagination not only does not require for its exercise the intervention of supernatural agency, but that, though such agency be excluded, the faculty may be called forth as imperiously, and for kindred results of pleasure, by incidents, within the compass of poetic probability, in the humblest departments of daily life. (*Peter Bell* 41)

It is important for Wordsworth that Peter Bell's eventual conversion be effected not through the supernatural but rather by the Spirits of the Mind (which some critics see as being simply a different kind of supernatural).

What is left unsaid in the discussion of natural and supernatural in the dedication is that *Peter Bell* is Wordsworth's response to Coleridge's *Rime* (just as *Rime* is in some sense a response to Wordsworth's earlier Salisbury Plain poems), which originated as a botched collaboration between the two poets. The parallels between these two long narrative poems are legion, and are concisely summarized by Kathleen Coburn:

> We have a lone Potter, instead of a lone Mariner—Peter is also a solitary wanderer figure—and the ass, not the albatross, a creature of earth, not air, is the injured victim. There is the same wanton attack on innocence. Helped by the eerie light, and a frightening sense of disturbance in

> the elements, as in *The Ancient Mariner*, the Satanic instrument of this piece also falls into a trance; he too suffers the sense of being pursued, his eyes ache, he feels remorse, repents, learns to love his fellow-creatures, and is made fit for human society. (124)

In Coleridge the Mariner is taught reverence for all living things through the supernatural; in Wordsworth's version the conversion originates within the subject rather than without, as Peter comes under the spell of the Spirits of the Mind.

Peter Bell can not stand a serious comparison with *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, any more than most poems written in English can, and from my perspective the obvious parallels between Wordsworth's and Coleridge's tales of redemption are less important than their common origin in the Salisbury Plain poems. Peter Bell's traumatic encounter with the dead body in the Swale is a repressive rewriting of the Sailor's gibbet scene in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. Though Coleridge's Mariner falls victim to a trance, in his case this is a straightforward loss of consciousness with no attendant psychological baggage; this is true because *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* is finally his poem and not Wordsworth's, and he did not *need* to repeat the trauma of the gibbet scene. It is certainly possible (and on some level necessary) to see *Peter Bell* as a "naturalized" version of Coleridge's poem, but Wordsworth's quarrel with his friend over the supernatural screens a more primal tension within himself. Responding to the supernatural as expressed in poems like those of Coleridge to some extent determined the *kind* of poetry Wordsworth would produce in his later career; but without *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* (and behind it the Real) there would perhaps be no meaningful career at all.

The events leading up to Peter's traumatic encounter may be summarized briefly. Wandering through the countryside by the river Swale, he comes across an unfamiliar path he hopes will turn out to be a shortcut. This path dead-ends in a quarry; he forces his way

> Right through the quarry;—and behold
> A scene of soft and lovely hue!
> Where blue, and grey, and tender green,
> Together made as sweet a scene

As ever human eye did view.

Beneath the clear blue sky he saw
A little field of meadow ground;
But field or meadow name it not;
Call it of earth a small green plot,
With rocks encompass'd round. (376-85)

This nature description suggests any number of other Wordsworth poems, but here the size and seclusion of the locale is emphasized: the scene of Peter's traumatic encounter is a tiny island of green. It is here that he sees the Ass gazing into the river, and decides to steal it as recompense for having wasted his time in taking a wrong turn. When the Ass resists his efforts to lead it away from the water, we are given the first glimpse of Peter's superstitious nature, which will be instrumental in his conversion:

Thought Peter, What can mean all this?
Some ugly witchcraft must be here! (451-52)

Peter's response to the Ass's resistance is a vicious beating with his staff. The Ass receives the abuse "In quiet uncomplaining mood" (463), and again refuses to budge. It is at this point that Peter notices the animal's starved state, and his complete lack of sympathy is characteristic of him at this point in the poem:

And Peter halts to gather breath,
And now full clearly was it shown
(What he before in part had seen)
How gaunt was the poor Ass and lean,
Yea wasted to a skeleton!

With legs stretched out and stiff he lay:—
No word of kind commiseration
Fell at the sight from Peter's tongue;
With hard contempt his heart was wrung,
With hatred and vexation.

The meagre beast lay still as death—
And Peter's lips with fury quiver—
Quoth he, "You little mulish dog,
"I'll fling your carcase like a log,
Head foremost down the river!" (486-500)

As he continues to beat the Ass, it begins to bray; at first the sound "on the heart of Peter, / Seems like a note of joy to strike" (506-07), but then there is an uncanny change:

What is there now in Peter's heart?
Or whence the might of this strange sound?
The moon uneasy look'd and dimmer,
The broad blue heavens appear'd to glimmer
And the rocks stagger'd all around. (521-25)

The source of this visual "glimmering" is obscure; it may be the "horrible" bray of the Ass, but the narrator does not make this connection explicitly. The description of the rocks staggering echoes the experience of the Sailor in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, immediately prior to his first trance:

The stones, as if to sweep him from the day,
Roll'd at his back along the living plain. (123-24)

After a moment Peter recovers, and is on the verge of beating the Ass again. It is at this point that he has his encounter with the not-quite-Real, his pseudo-gibbet scene, which culminates in the trance with which Part One of the poem ends. It will be useful to quote the lines pertaining to this trauma in full:

Whereat, in resolute mood, once more
He stoops the Ass's neck to seize—
Foul purpose, quickly put to flight!
For in the pool a startling sight
Meets him, beneath the shadowy trees.

Is it the moon's distorted face?

The ghost-like image of a cloud?
Is it a gallows there pourtray'd?
Is Peter of himself afraid?
Is it a coffin,—or a shroud?

A grisly idol hewn in stone?
Or imp from witch's lap let fall?
Or a gay ring of shining fairies,
Such as pursue their brisk vagaries
In sylvan bower or haunted hall?

Is it a fiend that to a stake
Of fire his desperate self is tethering?
Or stubborn spirit doom'd to yell
In solitary ward or cell,
Ten thousand miles from all his brethren?

Is it a party in a parlour?
Cramm'd just as they on earth were cramm'd—
Some sipping punch, some sipping tea,
But, as you by their faces see,
All silent, and all damn'd!

A throbbing pulse the Gazer hath—
Puzzled he was, and now is daunted;
He looks, he cannot choose but look;
Like one intent upon a book—
A book that is enchanted.

Ah, well-a-day for Peter Bell!—
He will be turned to iron soon,
Meet Statue for the court of Fear!
His hat is up—and every hair
Bristles—and whitens in the moon!

He looks—he ponders—looks again;
He sees a motion—hears a groan;—
His eyes will burst—his heart will break—

He gives a loud and frightful shriek,
And drops, a senseless weight, as if his life were flown! (536-75)

In *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, the Sailor's trance occurs because the gibbeted body so perfectly prefigures his own future death, throwing him back upon his biological Real. Here, Peter does not know what is beneath the surface of the water; the dead body he will discover at the beginning of Part Two is not a path to the Real for him, and when he identifies the corpse it is actually comforting. Peter's trance is caused by the obscurity of the water: he displays the same interpretive difficulties Wordsworth uses in Book IV of *The Prelude* to characterize gazing into the waters of autobiography, wondering if he may in actuality be looking at the reflection of the moon or a cloud. Then there are the evocations of the supernatural: the grisly idol, the imp, the fairies and fiend. We recall the disembodied voice of Stonehenge in *Salisbury Plain*, with its threats of spirits, fiends, and spectres. This hair-raising reference to the Gothic serves much the same function it does in the earlier poem, providing a Symbolic barrier against a Real which might (but in fact does not) lurk below the surface of the river: the supernatural might be somewhat disturbing, but remains finally in the realm of language, and of course no imp or fiend will attack, at least not in a Wordsworth poem.

The most explicit reference to the Symbolic in this passage is the suggestion that Peter is "Like one intent upon a book— / A book that is enchanted." If there is such a thing as an enchanted book, it is preferable to the Real. For Peter, obviously, this encounter is traumatic, if not as traumatic as the Real; for Wordsworth as poet, the scene is reassuring. Compelled to repeat, to revisit the gibbet scene of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, Wordsworth defensively reinterprets the scene as something protectively obscure. The device of placing the (not-quite-)Real beneath the water allows Wordsworth to have it both ways: the traumatic encounter is represented, but once the trance is past it turns out that it was not the Real after all. With respect to *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, the two most important lines are

Is it a gallows there pourtray'd?
Is Peter of himself afraid?

When the Sailor sees the gibbet, of course he immediately becomes very afraid of himself. But with Peter the lines are strangely inappropriate, if we do not assume the unconscious pressures of the earlier poem as Wordsworth writes. Peter will later be ashamed of himself, but not afraid; and in spite of his many crimes he has done nothing for which he would be condemned to death. While *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* is a poem about being condemned for crimes, *Peter Bell* (like its sister poem *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*) is about redemption, about forgiveness and change. All that awaits the Sailor is his doom, the future coincidence of Symbolic and Real death. Peter Bell can and will change for the better; to the extent that *Peter Bell* speaks to Wordsworth's guilt relating to Annette Vallon, the poet hopes for the same opportunity. The trauma Peter experiences at the Swale on Wordsworth's behalf is a kind of penance, and suggestive of the anguish of the Real; but this is *not* the Real, and transcendence is repressed to the banks of a different river.

As with *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, the trance scene occurs relatively early in the work. Just as the experience at the gibbet is a first step to the Sailor's settling of accounts, so the scene at the Swale is only the beginning of Peter's conversion. After recovering from his trance at the beginning of Part Two, Peter quickly realizes that the object beneath the water is a dead body, that of the Ass's master. As he works to bring the dead man to the surface, the creature he has been so viciously beating "fondly licks his hands" (610). After the corpse has been brought to dry land, the Ass determines the immediate course of the narrative:

> The meagre Shadow all this while—
> What aim is his? what is he doing?
> His sudden fit of joy is flown,—
> He on his knees hath laid him down,
> As if he were his grief renewing.
>
> That Peter on his back should mount
> He shows a wish, well as he can,
> "I'll go, I'll go, whate'er betide—
> "He to his home my way will guide,
> "The cottage of the drowned man." (631-40)

As Peter and the Ass work their way toward the dead man's home, they hear the voice of his son searching for him. The Ass turns to follow the voice, and Peter superstitiously decides he will be punished:

> But Peter, when he saw the Ass
> Not only stop but turn, and change
> The cherish'd tenor of his pace
> That lamentable noise to chase,
> It wrought in him conviction strange;
>
> A faith that, for the dead man's sake
> And this poor slave who lov'd him well,
> Vengeance upon his head will fall,
> Some visitation worse than all
> Which ever till this night befel. (701-10)

The denouement of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* follows logically from the gibbet scene; but Peter's "conviction strange" and the events that follow it do not *seem* to be connected to his trance. One of the primary questions asked in *Peter Bell* (and this is finally a question Wordsworth is asking of himself) is, How does a bad man become a good man? In the defensive fictions of Wordsworthian autobiography, this is a question that need never be asked, thanks to the childhood influence of Nature. But Peter Bell has often been exposed to the natural world, and is a scoundrel. As Melvin R. Watson puts it: "Wordsworth has created a real challenge to the forces of Nature. If she can pierce the armor of Peter Bell, then no one should be safe from her attacks" (525). As critics like Watson, Leah Sinanoglou Marcus, and Frederick Garber have noted, it is Peter's superstition that makes him susceptible to the influence of Nature. This is perhaps not finally so different from a Wordsworthian imaginative response to the natural world. As Garber says: "Peter has a kind of sensibility, and that is a certain good, while its content is, for the moment, unimportant. It is better to feel something than not to feel at all, and superstition is somewhere on the side of imagination" (*Poetry of Encounter* 131).

In any case, Peter has decided that he is going to be punished, and he interprets perfectly normal natural phenomena as signs of his coming suffering. As he and the Ass move forward, he hears a rustling

behind them, and finds that the wind is blowing a leaf behind them. Peter's reaction to this apparently meaningless datum is reflective of the change he is undergoing:

> "Where there is not a bush or tree,
> "The very leaves they follow me—
> "So huge hath been my wickedness!" (758-60)

Then as he looks back he notices the periodic appearance of a drop of blood, and this sets off a new round of terror:

> A stain—as of a drop of blood
> By moonlight made more faint and wan—
> Ha! why this comfortless despair?
> He knows not how the blood came there,
> And Peter is a wicked man.
>
> At length he spies a bleeding wound,
> Where he had struck the Ass's head;
> He sees the blood, knows what it is,—
> A glimpse of sudden joy was his,
> But then it quickly fled;
>
> Of him whom sudden death had seized
> He thought,—of thee, O faithful Ass!
> And once again those darting pains,
> As meteors shoot through heaven's wide plains,
> Pass through his bosom—and repass! (771-85)

The superstitious terror he associates with the blood is such that when he recognizes its natural origins he is, momentarily, relieved; but of course the blood is a confirmation of his viciousness, of his need to be punished.

Peter's discovery of the Ass's wound is parallel to the Sailor's discovery in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* of the beaten child's injury. Seeing the child's wound is traumatic for the Sailor because it is at the exact location of the fatal wound he had inflicted on his victim. The injury to the Ass serves a similar function. In an earlier draft of *Peter*

Bell, in considering the reasons for Peter's terror on seeing the drops of blood, the narrator poses questions which are clearly written in the shadow of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*:

> Did Peter e'er with club or stone
> Smite some poor traveller on the head,
> Or beat his father in a rage
> And spill the blood of his old age,
> Or kick a child till he was dead?
>
> Did Peter ever kill his man
> With fist or staff in single duel,
> Or stab with some inhuman wound
> A soldier bleeding on the ground?
> No—Peter never was so cruel. (MSS. 2 and 3, 901-10)

The cluster of imagery here is too specific and concentrated to be a coincidental echo of the earlier work: the Sailor did indeed kill a man described as a "traveller," and the injury was to the head; and there is also in the earlier work the physical abuse of a male child. The decisive word in these two stanzas is "No," which might as well be answering the question, Is Peter Bell identical to the Sailor? The narrator tells us that Peter never was so cruel, but is violence against a human being such a tremendous leap from the cruelty we see him inflict on the Ass? Wordsworth in these lines is trying to distinguish Peter's personality from the Sailor's, and for a very pressing reason. Peter must be able to change, to be redeemed. If Peter were the Sailor, guilty of his crimes, then it might indeed have been the gallows—a harbinger of the Real—he saw in the Swale.

The beginning of Part Three of *Peter Bell*, which has the feel of an interlude, has the narrator introducing his audience to what he calls the Spirits of the Mind:

> I've heard of one, a gentle soul,
> Though given to sadness and to gloom,
> And for the fact will vouch, one night
> It chanc'd that by a taper's light
> This man was reading in his room;

Reading, as you or I might read
At night in any pious book,
When sudden blackness overspread
The snow-white page on which he read,
And made the good man round him look.

The chamber walls were dark all round,—
And to his book he turn'd again;
—The light had left the good man's taper,
And form'd itself upon the paper,
Into large letters—bright and plain!

The godly book was in his hand—
And, on the page more black than coal,
Appeared, set forth in strange array,
A *word*—which to his dying day
Perplex'd the good man's gentle soul.

The ghostly word, which thus was fram'd,
Did never from his lips depart;
But he hath said, poor gentle wight!
It brought full many a sin to light
Out of the bottom of his heart. (786-810)

Though their actions are here described in considerably more detail, these Spirits are *Peter Bell*'s answer to the "mind's phantoms" in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain.* The mind's phantoms, it will be recalled, are Wordsworth's makeshift term for the Real; but the Spirits of the Mind are very different. In the narrator's example of the "goodly soul," the workings of the Spirits manifest themselves as the *word* that appears on the man's book. Like the formula for trimethylamine in Freud's dream, this is more than a little out of the ordinary, but is finally a reassuring manifestation of the Symbolic. The specific word that the man sees is never revealed, but this is unimportant; as Lacan says of "trimethylamine," this word means nothing except that it is a word. The mind's phantoms are what cause the Sailor's trance; these unReal Spirits are necessarily far less potent, and do not make an appearance until after the trance has passed.

The narrator wonders why the Spirits would bother to trouble "goodly souls" like the individual in his example; their skills are better used on ruffians like Peter Bell:

> Dread Spirits! to torment the good
> Why wander from your course so far,
> Disordering colour form and stature!
> —Let good men feel the soul of Nature,
> And see things as they are.
>
> I know you, potent Spirits! well,
> How with the feeling and the sense
> Playing, ye govern foes or friends,
> Yok'd to your will, for fearful ends—
> And this I speak in reverence!
>
> But might I give advice to you,
> Whom in my fear I love so well,
> From men of pensive virtue go,
> Dread Beings! and your empire show
> On hearts like that of Peter Bell. (811-25)

Feeling the soul of Nature is a reasonable paraphrase of what seems to happen to Wordsworth at the Wye in *Tintern Abbey*. This wish on Wordsworth's part does not stem so much from a need to shun the Spirits (which are clearly not as frightening to the narrator as he pretends) as it does from Wordsworth's need to repress his identification with Peter. In telling the Spirits their business, the narrator (and behind him the poet) supposes two mutually exclusive categories of people; he and Peter are not cut from the same cloth.

Evidently the Spirits take the narrator's advice, and begin showing their empire to Peter. (Why the earlier business with the leaf and drops of blood, not to mention the superstitious conviction that he will be punished, are not the work of these same Spirits is not made clear.) First he hears a rumbling beneath the earth. The narrator quickly informs his audience that this has a perfectly reasonable source in the work of miners underground. Peter's first assumption, though, is that the earth is going to swallow him. He begins to reflect on his misdeeds,

"turn'd adrift into the past" (931). One crime in particular stands out in his mind, and here we come to the vicinity of Wordsworth's Real motive for composing *Peter Bell*:

> But more than all, his heart is stung
> To think of one, almost a child;
> A sweet and playful Highland girl,
> As light and beauteous as a squirrel,
> As beauteous and as wild!
>
> A lonely house her dwelling was,
> A cottage in a heathy dell;
> And she put on her gown of green,
> And left her mother at sixteen,
> And followed Peter Bell.
>
> But many good and pious thoughts
> Had she; and, in the kirk to pray,
> Two long Scotch miles, through rain or snow,
> To kirk she had been used to go,
> Twice every sabbath-day.
>
> And, when she follow'd Peter Bell,
> It was to lead an honest life;
> For he, with tongue not used to falter,
> Had pledg'd his troth before the altar
> To love her as his wedded wife.
>
> A mother's hope is hers;—but soon
> She droop'd and pin'd like one forlorn;—
> From Scripture she a name did borrow;
> Benoni, or the child of sorrow,
> She call'd her babe unborn.
>
> For she had learn'd how Peter liv'd,
> And took it in most grievous part;
> She to the very bone was worn,
> And, ere that little child was born,

Died of a broken heart. (936-65)

As Wordsworth himself remarks in the Fenwick note, Benoni was the name given to a bastard child the poet knew in his childhood. Behind the choice of this name is the unwed mother of Wordsworth's child in France, but it is interesting that the Highland girl's child is never born. I suggested that this reflects Wordsworth's need to deny responsibility for the pain he has caused Annette Vallon and their daughter: it is the unfortunate mother's death, and not a direct action of Peter's, that results in the death of the child. This narrative detail may also reflect the despair of a man writing in 1798 who has not seen his lover in more than five years, and has never met his daughter. We are not told at what point in her pregnancy the Highland girl dies (specifying this would be as unpoetic as giving the reader the measurements of a pond); if we posit that this occurs when she is seven and a half months along, then the "death" of mother and unborn child may represent the miserable leave-taking at Orléans in October of 1792.

The thought of the Highland girl prompts a vision:

And now the Spirits of the Mind
Are busy with poor Peter Bell;
Distraction reigns in soul and sense,
And reason drops in impotence
From her deserted pinnacle!

Close by a brake of flowering furze
(Above it shivering aspins play)
He sees an unsubstantial creature,
His very self in form and feature,
Not four yards from the broad highway;

And stretch'd beneath the furze he sees
The Highland girl—it is no other;
And hears her crying, as she cried
The very moment that she died,
"My mother! oh my mother!" (966-80)

This is a frightening apparition (and the closest we have to the supernatural as an objective presence in the poem), but the encounter does not result in a repetition of the trance at the Swale. We might think again of the Sailor's gibbet scene: the vision of his expiring victim could certainly trigger the Real, but it does not. *Peter Bell*, again, is not about coming to terms with one's crimes, but rather about changing into the kind of person who will no longer commit crimes. As with the scene at the river, this is the not-quite-Real, and if there is any danger of it settling into the Real for Peter, this is immediately and decisively foreclosed by the Symbolic. From a nearby church the voice of a "fervent Methodist" promises him the opportunity for redemption:

> "Repent! repent! though ye have gone
> "Through paths of wickedness and woe
> "After the Babylonian harlot,
> "And though your sins be red as scarlet
> "They shall be white as snow!" (1001-05)

The change wrought in Peter by this message is instantaneous:

> Sweet tears of hope and tenderness!
> And fast they fell, a plenteous shower;
> His nerves, his sinews seem'd to melt;
> Through all his iron frame was felt
> A gentle, a relaxing power!
>
> Each fibre of his frame was weak,
> Weak all the animal within,
> But in its helplessness grew mild
> And gentle as an infant child,
> An infant that has known no sin. (1011-20)

This is not the place for a discussion of theology, but the Symbolic import of the Methodist's message is that it is a series of words that protects Peter from a more serious consideration of the frightening tableau he sees before him. Christian redemption need not of necessity equal a refusal of responsibility, but I would note that after the

Methodist's speech *Peter Bell* continues for nearly another two hundred lines, and not one more word is devoted to the Highland girl.

The Ass brings Peter to the drowned man's home, and it is left to him to break the news to widow and orphans. The conclusion of the poem provides a happy ending of sorts:

> And Peter Bell, who, till that night,
> Had been the wildest of his clan,
> Forsook his crimes, repressed his folly,
> And, after ten months' melancholy,
> Became a good and honest man. (1181-85)

At the risk of making my reading too doggedly biographical (if it is not already), these ten months might be a reasonable approximation for Wordsworth's miserable 1793. Has Wordsworth in the five years following this dark period become a good and honest man? Behind *Peter Bell* there is an anxiety associated with this question, and the conclusion is written with the hope that the answer is yes. Peter Bell's conversion is profoundly moving, but we must ask whether it is believable. Peter's age is never given, but the narrator tells us he has been a rover "two and thirty years or more" (216). If his conversion is based on the exposure of a superstitious personality to the ministry of Nature, should it not have occurred much earlier? This echoes the seemingly incongruous acquisition of the egotistical sublime which is said in *Tintern Abbey* to occur sometime in one's midtwenties. Here, also, something is not quite right. Wordsworth's narrator puts great stock in the Spirits of the Mind, but their only excuse may be that they don't exist. In the end, the truth of John Beer's statement is undeniable: "[I]f Peter Bell's conversion fails to satisfy the reader it is because his reclaimed status seems to deny so much of his former personality" (*Human Heart* 130). This lack of realism may seem like an unusual lapse from so acute a psychologist as Wordsworth; but Peter's personality is based on the poet's emotional needs rather than observation of another person. The same emotional substructure will be found in *The Thorn*, but there the traumatic days of October 1792 will be seen from Annette Vallon's perspective, at least as Wordsworth imagines it.

Martha Ray and Annette Vallon: *The Thorn*

> The poem of the Thorn, as the reader will soon discover, is not supposed to be spoken in the author's own person: the character of the loquacious narrator will sufficiently shew itself in the course of the story.
>
> -1798 Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads*

> The character which I have here introduced speaking is sufficiently common. The Reader will perhaps have a general notion of it, if he has ever known a man, a Captain of a small trading vessel for example, who being past the middle age of life, has retired upon an annuity or small independent income to some village or country town of which he was not a native, or in which he had not been accustomed to live. Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; and from the same cause, and other predisposing causes by which it is probable that such men may have been affected, they are prone to superstition. On which account it appeared to me proper to select a character like this to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind.
>
> -1800 note to *The Thorn*

Why go to all this trouble to describe the narrator of *The Thorn*? The brief comment from 1798 does little more than announce its own superfluity: the reader will read the poem and see for himself. By 1800 Wordsworth's faith in the self-sufficiency of the work has apparently eroded, and we are given an extensive description of the Captain who spins the tale. This seems unnecessary if the ultimate reason for the note is to make the point that the narrator of the poem is not Wordsworth. The assessment of the 1798 comment seems accurate: we do not need the poet to tell us he is not the speaker of the poem. The dramatic context of the poem is made sufficiently clear by the unnamed interlocutor's numerous interruptions of the story ("'But what's the thorn? And what's the pond? / 'And what's the hill of moss to her?'" (199-200)). In 1800 Wordsworth delineates a particular type of character

that is prone to superstition (and indeed this quality in the narrator is an important consonance with Peter Bell), but one wonders why he goes so far as to tell us the man's former occupation. A reader (like myself) disposed to see later works in the context of the Salisbury Plain poems might be tempted to see a connection between this Captain and that Sailor, and to cite this connection as evidence of a foregrounding of sea voyages in the poet's unconscious. We need not press this very far: I believe Wordsworth goes into such detail in describing the Captain (regardless of the specific nature of that detail) in order to underscore the fact that he is not identical with Wordsworth. (It is interesting—though perhaps not terribly important—in comparing the 1798 and 1800 descriptions of *The Thorn*, to note that the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* is the first in which Wordsworth is identified on the title page as author.) Wordsworth's history of commentary on the poem suggests he is protesting too much: in 1798, he says "this isn't me"; in 1800, "this isn't me, and let me prove the point by telling you who it *is*." If, as I believe, Martha Ray represents Annette Vallon, Wordsworth seems determined to disavow any connection with her, even though the narrator's connection with her is presented as being very tangential.

The Thorn is a poem about hearsay. The narrator is very scrupulous about distinguishing what he has personally seen from the rumors about Martha Ray that are current in the neighborhood. Language, the stuff of the Symbolic, is Wordsworth's most common defense against the terrors associated with the Real, and nowhere in the Wordsworth canon is the Symbolic edifice more sturdy and weatherproof. If Martha's pregnancy is related to the Real, then no one is in danger of encountering this trauma, because it occurred more than two decades prior to the poem's present. Instead of a direct encounter with the Real, people tell *stories* about Martha's pregnancy and its aftermath, and these words (along with the passage of time) prevent one from ever finding out the truth. The Real—or more likely, the not-quite-Real—would be encountered at the pond next to the thorn, where, if one gazes steadily at the water, it is said that

> The shadow of a babe you trace,
> A baby and a baby's face,
> And that it looks at you;
> Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain

The baby looks at you again. (227-31)

The narrator encourages his interlocutor to go see for himself, but any such encounter occurs beyond the boundaries of the poem, and there is no suggestion that the Captain is in a hurry to test the truth of the rumor for himself. With Martha Ray, nobody knows for certain what happened, and whatever happened happened a very long time ago. Biographically we see a poet unable to witness the final days of his lover's pregnancy, and who in thinking about this in 1798 may very well feel that two decades have passed since his last meeting with Annette Vallon. In terms of a potential encounter suggestive of the Real, placing the relevant events in the distant past is a fortunate protective strategy, and one that will be extensively exploited in *The Prelude*.

The narrator of *The Thorn*, again, is careful to distinguish fact from rumor, and this can be seen in his painstaking description of the scene at the beginning of the poem:

> There is a thorn; it looks so old,
> In truth you'd find it hard to say,
> How it could ever have been young,
> It looks so old and grey.
> Not higher than a two-years' child,
> It stands erect this aged thorn;
> No leaves it has, no thorny points;
> It is a mass of knotted joints,
> A wretched thing forlorn.
> It stands erect, and like a stone
> With lichens it is overgrown. (1-11)

"Three yards beyond" (29) the thorn

> You see a little muddy pond
> Of water, never dry;
> I've measured it from side to side:
> 'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide. (30-33)

Finally, there is also close to the thorn

A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,
Just half a foot in height.
All lovely colours there you see,
All colours that were ever seen,
And mossy network too is there,
As if by hand of lady fair
The work had woven been,
And cups, the darlings of the eye
So deep is their vermilion dye. (36-44)

Along with the attention to natural shape and color that is typically Wordsworthian, the narrator is specific both about the objects' size and their spatial relationship to one another. The height of the mound, the distance between thorn and pond, and the size of the pond are described with specific numbers. In particular, the Captain's assertion regarding the pond—"I've measured it from side to side: / 'Tis three feet long and two feet wide"—is often cited as a prime example of Wordsworthian bathos, which no doubt has much to do with Coleridge singling out the lines for criticism in *Biographia Literaria.* I see this dogged specificity as reflective of a character being as thorough as possible about what he *does* know, with the full recognition that much of his story is guesswork. As the particulars of the story, the facts, it is reasonable that the narrator would be paying close attention to them. As Mary Jacobus says of these natural objects (adding Martha Ray herself to the list): "Woman, thorn, pond, and mound are the fixed points round which the poem revolves; we return to them again and again, yet are never able to clarify their connections or significance" (*Tradition and Experiment* 246).

With respect to the specific descriptions of the thorn, pond, and mound, it is important to note that they are all small; and as early as the fifth line of the poem we are given a hint as to the significance of this, when the narrator says that the thorn is "Not higher than a two-years' child." No one knows what happened to Martha's child, but all agree that the mound is its grave. If Martha killed the baby, it is said that she may have hanged it on the thorn, or perhaps she drowned it in the pond. Given the dimensions of these objects, only a small child could have been killed in either of these ways; and if the mound is someone's grave, it would have to be that of a child, as the narrator points out

several times ("like an infant's grave in size" and so on). Rumor completes the writing of Martha's sad story, and the objective features of the landscape contribute part of the material for this process.

In addition to these natural elements, the other focal point for *The Thorn* is Martha Ray herself, and again we are dependent on the narrator for what limited knowledge we have of her in the present. In advising his interlocutor to go see the thorn for himself, the Captain advises the selection of a time when Martha will not be there:

> Now would you see this aged thorn,
> This pond and beauteous hill of moss,
> You must take care and chuse your time
> The mountain when to cross.
> For oft there sits, between the heap
> That's like an infant's grave in size,
> And that same pond of which I spoke,
> A woman in a scarlet cloak,
> And to herself she cries,
> "Oh misery! oh misery!
> Oh woe is me! oh misery!" (56-66)

The Captain also offers an instance of having encountered Martha himself:

> *But that she goes to this old thorn,*
> The thorn which I've described to you,
> And there sits in a scarlet cloak,
> I will be sworn is true.
> For one day with my telescope,
> To view the ocean wide and bright,
> When to this country first I came,
> Ere I had heard of Martha's name,
> I climbed the mountain's height:
> A storm came on, and I could see
> No object higher than my knee.
>
> 'Twas mist and rain, and storm and rain,
> No screen, no fence could I discover,

And then the wind! in faith, it was
A wind full ten times over.
I looked around, I thought I saw
A jutting crag, and off I ran,
Head-foremost, through the driving rain,
The shelter of the crag to gain,
And, as I am a man,
Instead of jutting crag, I found
A woman seated on the ground.

I did not speak—I saw her face,
Her face it was enough for me;
I turned about and heard her cry,
"O misery! O misery!"
And there she sits, until the moon
Through half the clear blue sky will go,
And when the little breezes make
The waters of the pond to shake,
As all the country know,
She shudders and you hear her cry,
"Oh misery! oh misery!" (177-209)

As far as we can tell, this is the Captain's only meeting with Martha at the thorn; in fact the only evidence he offers that she is at the location "oft" is his encounter with her during the storm. Apparently this singular experience was somewhat traumatic for the narrator—his statement that Martha's face "was enough for me" in its vagueness suggests something that can not be spoken—but the reasons for this are not entirely clear. It may be going too far to suggest that this was an experience of the Real for the Captain (it seems to me this depends on whether we insist that the Captain is Wordsworth and Martha Annette Vallon), but it is certainly possible to see it as a kernel around which the stories of Martha coalesce. The equation here is very straightforward and perhaps banal: infant-sized thorn plus infant-sized pond plus infant-sized mound plus distraught mother in their midst equals rumors of a murdered child. The Captain talks about the thorn rumors as if they are general in the neighborhood, but one must wonder if they originate with him; given the nature of the poem, our only experience

of the Captain is his rumor-mongering, so this is perhaps not unlikely. Sue Weaver Schopf argues that the Captain's story is so polished that he must have recited it many times (37). I agree that one gets this feeling when reading *The Thorn*, but that is of course also to an extent the nature of poetry; the polish of the tale is perhaps no more remarkable than the fact that it rhymes. To whatever extent the encounter with the woman has been traumatic for the narrator, he shows a drive to move beyond its facts to a story about Martha. In his reliance on the Symbolic as a shield against trauma, at least, he may be said to be a Wordsworthian character, not very different from the poet of *Salisbury Plain*.

The Captain's story seems to be an amalgam of his own experience and what he has heard about Martha Ray's past. (He did not live in the neighborhood when her story may properly be said to have begun.) He tells his interlocutor her story as he knows it:

> 'Tis now some two and twenty years,
> Since she (her name is Martha Ray)
> Gave with a maiden's true good will
> Her company to Stephen Hill;
> And she was blithe and gay,
> And she was happy, happy still
> Whene'er she thought of Stephen Hill.
>
> And they had fix'd the wedding-day,
> The morning that must wed them both;
> But Stephen to another maid
> Had sworn another oath;
> And with this other maid to church
> Unthinking Stephen went—
> Poor Martha! on that woful day
> A cruel, cruel fire, they say,
> Into her bones was sent:
> It dried her body like a cinder,
> And almost turn'd her brain to tinder.
>
> They say, full six months after this,
> While yet the summer-leaves were green,

She to the mountain-top would go,
And there was often seen.
'Tis said, a child was in her womb,
As now to any eye was plain;
She was with child, and she was mad,
Yet often she was sober sad
From her exceeding pain.
Oh me! ten thousand times I'd rather
That he had died, that cruel father! (115-43)

We do not know very much about Stephen Hill, other than the fact that he is unthinking and abandons Martha. At some point her pregnancy becomes noticeable, and this is the last direct information anyone had about the matter. Given the time that passed after Stephen left her, she would presumably be at least six months pregnant (if not more) when information about the pregnancy was suddenly cut off. When Wordsworth left Annette Vallon at Orléans, she was seven and a half months pregnant; and in a sense as with Martha direct observation of the pregnancy breaks off, leaving Wordsworth to complete his stories about Annette, one of which is *The Thorn*. (This reading, as with the desire to be gibbeted in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, assumes a somewhat melodramatic response by Wordsworth. He knew his daughter was alive and well, and that Annette was not insane.) The narrator's bitter statement regarding Stephen ("ten thousand times I'd rather / That he had died, that cruel father!") reveals Wordsworth's rage against himself; fictional masks in this case shield a confession.

It is at this point that we begin to find gaps in Martha's story, and as storyteller it becomes the Captain's job to complete the tale, which he does by combining what he has seen with what he has heard. The focal points for his tale, as Jacobus notes, are Martha herself, the thorn, the pond, and the mound. Again, the narrator claims his speculations are general in the area, though perhaps in fact they originate with him. In any case, given his elaborate description of these natural objects, the narrative use he puts them to is quite concise:

some will say
She hanged her baby on the tree,
Some say she drowned it in the pond,

Which is a little step beyond,
But all and each agree,
The little babe was buried there,
Beneath that hill of moss so fair. (214-20)

The Captain is perfectly aware that at this point he is engaged in speculation, the stuff of rumor. Also hypothetical is this poem's reworking of the gibbet scene from *Adventures on Salisbury Plain,* which as in *Peter Bell* involves gazing upon a body of water:

Some say, if to the pond you go,
And fix on it a steady view,
The shadow of a babe you trace,
A baby and a baby's face,
And that it looks at you;
Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain
The baby looks at you again. (225-31)

As with Peter Bell's dizzying speculations about what turns out to be a dead body, we have the suggestion here of the supernatural, which Wordsworth at this point in his career is beginning to avoid. Though the poet claimed he was inspired to write this work by direct observation of a thorn similar to the one he describes, readers of *The Thorn* were quick to recognize a literary source in Gottfried August Bürger's "Des Pfarrers Tochter von Taubenhain," which was translated as "The Lass of Fair Wone" by William Taylor for the *Monthly Magazine* of April 1796. John K. Primeau summarizes this work, describing it as

> the story of the innocent young daughter of a parson who falls in love with a nobleman. He seduces her and makes her pregnant. After several months her disgraced father expels her from his home, whereupon the daughter entreats her lover to marry her and put an end to her shame. Her lover responds that he is a nobleman and therefore cannot marry her, because she does not belong to the same social class. She curses the nobleman and shortly thereafter she gives birth to the baby, but in her

> deep despair she kills the infant with a silver hairpin,
> burying the child in a shallow grave. (94)

After the death of the mother (in an act surely resonant for the author of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, she is gibbeted for her crime), she haunts the baby's grave. As both Primeau and Jacobus point out, Wordsworth in *The Thorn* naturalizes the sensational, turning the supernatural (a disembodied skull, for example) into the ordinary (the anguished but living woman). The last vestiges of the sensational are relegated to the insubstantial world of rumor. As Primeau says: "The intimations of foul play and eerie happenings are merely second-hand reports and are no way presented in a matter-of-fact manner by the narrator" (95). Again the parallel with *Peter Bell* is relatively obvious. The other trauma poem is Wordsworth's answer to *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, with the "supernatural" the product of a troubled mind which does see the cause underlying the effect: we think of underground gunpowder interpreted as an angry world ready to swallow Peter. Peter's conversion is accomplished because of his superstitious nature, because of his need to look imaginatively beyond the mundane explanation; it will be recalled that in Wordsworth's 1800 note to *The Thorn* he particularly draws attention to the Captain's superstition. He is either the kind of man that would invent a story of a murdered baby gazing at you through the water, or the kind that believes in such stories, and passes them on.

If Wordsworth in 1798 is of a mind to repudiate the supernaturalism of a Coleridge or a Bürger, this does nothing to prevent the very necessary (and very supernatural) appearance of the baby imagery in *The Thorn*. If we imagine Martha Ray as the hypothetical gazer upon the pond, the living, *looking* image of her dead baby certainly might occasion the Real for her, a horrible and uncanny reminder of her crime. (It is salutary to here recall that another name for the Lacanian Real is the impossible.) And if Martha Ray represents Annette Vallon, of course, this image would also be related to the Real for Wordsworth. Martha is not identical with Annette, but perhaps she is an icon for the irrational fears concerning the future that ran through Wordsworth's tormented mind as he parted from his lover in 1792.

In the trauma poetry of the late 1790s Wordsworth is working on new ways to protect himself from the trauma of the Real sublime. In

Peter Bell we have something that threatens to be the Real, but which is finally not, as Peter finds redemption without accountability. In *The Thorn,* the Real may be discovered at the pond—so the story goes—but the movement of the poem does not bring us close enough to the water to find out. Language serves the same protective function it did in the Salisbury Plain poems, offering Wordsworth layers of insulation from the Real. Martha Ray was pregnant, this may be taken as a fact, but then rumor steps in: we do not know if she had the child; if she had the child, we do not know if it was born alive or dead; if born alive, we do not know if she killed it; if she killed it, we do not know if she drowned it or hanged it, or perhaps employed some other method. There is a story that Martha did something horrible to her child, but this is only a story; or if not, we must go to the pond and see for ourselves. Taken together, these two trauma poems provide a reasonable composite of Wordsworth's feelings about Annette Vallon in 1798, which ultimately are associated with the Real. In *The Thorn* Wordsworth's guilty feelings find expression and catharsis, as he imagines a horrible outcome to a pregnancy, an outcome which does not finally take on the status of a fact. In *Peter Bell,* which examines the poet's side of the relationship, the protagonist is saved from a possible encounter with the Real by the concept of Christian redemption, by the notion that a bad man can become a good man in open defiance of his past. If *The Thorn* is a description of how Wordsworth does not want to see Annette Vallon, *Peter Bell* is about how he *does* want to see himself. Compelled to repeat, to return to the vicinity of his Real, Wordsworth responds with trauma poetry, which becomes a chronicle of the hopes and fears he associates with Annette. As of 1798, the egotistical sublime and trauma poetry are both in place, each serving to protect Wordsworth from the other. The next step will be to integrate these two very different kinds of poetry into the story of Wordsworth's life, but before this can be done a bridge between the two must be constructed.

4. Toward 1805: The Two-Part *Prelude* and *Resolution and Independence*

Scene 1, October 1800: A poet and his sister meet a former leech-gatherer. Due to the scarcity of leeches and his own failing strength, this old man has been forced to become a beggar. He is on his way to Carlisle to purchase books to sell.

Scene 2, May-July 1802: The poet, alone, meets a leech-gatherer, who is in the process of trying to find leeches in a pool. Despite the scarcity of leeches, he perseveres in his work, and the poet takes him as an icon of the resolution and independence he wishes for himself.

The movement from Scene 1 to Scene 2 is the movement from journal to poetry, from Dorothy Wordsworth's record of the original encounter with the old man to her brother's literary interpretation of the same. Our analysis of *Tintern Abbey* has prepared us for Wordsworthian memories that are less than factually accurate. But in the earlier work it is largely the implausibility of the recollections that gives them the lie; with *Resolution and Independence*, on the other hand, we have another witness who directly contradicts the poet. How important is this? Wordsworth seems to be speaking as himself in the poem about the leech-gatherer ("We Poets in our youth begin in gladness" (48)), suggesting autobiography. But of course Wordsworth would not be the first poet to rework the raw data of his experiences into a new form, and his motives for this might just as well be conscious as unconscious. It is interesting, though, that the actual leech-gatherer is notable for his dependence on the charity of others, while in the poem it is the old man's strength of mind and his ability to support himself that makes him something for Wordsworth to aspire to. Wordsworth seems to have a pressing need to describe the poetic leech-gatherer as the opposite of his source.

Like the memory of the Wye depicted in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth's recollection of the leech-gatherer is a screen memory. In the years immediately following *Tintern Abbey*'s publication in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's poetry becomes increasingly retrospective, as he finds in memory the medium for telling the story of the growth of his mind. The full-length *Prelude* of 1805, composed of an elaborate network of screen memories, will in some ways represent the culmination of the Great Decade. The composition of *Resolution and Independence* is an important step in this process, a step made necessary by the composition of the Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799, which in turn is made necessary by *Tintern Abbey*. The genealogy here will require some elaboration.

Tintern Abbey is the first story of Wordsworth's psychological development, an embryonic *Prelude* of sorts. In order to posit his theory of the egotistical sublime—and to protect himself from the menace of the Real sublime which he had confronted five years earlier—Wordsworth speaks of his twenty-three year-old 1793 self as a thoughtless child, not yet ready for the transcendence celebrated in 1798. In this strange opposition between one's early and late twenties as crucial mileposts in personality formation, what is left out of the equation (except as a two-line parenthetical comment) is actual childhood. In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth wants to thank the Wye valley for making him the person that he is, but his illusion that his first visit to the area was as a twenty-three year-old clean slate cannot be sustained. Childhood and trauma are ignored by the first poem of the egotistical sublime, and the 1799 *Prelude* strives for realism in depicting mental growth.

The 1799 *Prelude* tells a story the poet has until its composition passed over. Not only are these roughly nine hundred lines of blank verse the first extended treatment of childhood in the Wordsworth canon; they are the first acknowledgment from the poet that trauma has played a crucial role in forming his character. Having fictionalized trauma in *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn* (and before these works in the Salsibury Plain poems), Wordsworth's ingenious means of making trauma a part of his own story is to relegate it to the distant past, to see such moments as being the stuff of a childhood escaped. Trauma was necessary for the poet—it made him the man he is—but that time is past. The childhood memories of trauma Wordsworth discusses in the

1799 *Prelude* are screen memories, and what they protect the poet from is the traumatic Real sublime as encountered on Salisbury Plain in 1793. At this point, having experimented with autobiographical self-analysis in *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth does not need to protect himself from his Real by creating a fictionalized poetry of trauma. Instead, appropriate screen memories are selected by the unconscious to shield the poet from the anguish he would continue to associate with Salisbury Plain.

One effect of this displacement of Salisbury Plain trauma onto early childhood in the first version of *The Prelude* is that after 1799 there will be no need for further trauma poems like *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*. As frightening as childhood trauma might have been, it was a means to an end: terrifying moments in youth are necessary to the development of a healthy adult personality, allowing for such adult joys as those associated with the egotistical sublime. But how does Wordsworth evolve from a traumatic childhood in *The Prelude* to an adulthood presided over by the egotistical sublime in *Tintern Abbey*? The 1799 *Prelude* does not help to answer this question any more than did *Tintern Abbey*. Just as *Tintern Abbey* does not say anything substantive about childhood, so this first *Prelude*—ostensibly the story of the growth of the mind—stops at adolescence, as if no more needs to be told. Wordsworth describes the terrors of the Real sublime—reinterpreted as something far less menacing—as part of childhood, but to insulate the adult self against them, he does not yet make them part of the *whole* story of the growth of his mind.

In the full-length 1805 version of *The Prelude*, childhood trauma poetry will finally coexist with the adult egotistical sublime. As a protective barrier between the two, Wordsworth develops a third type of poem—which I call the encounter poem[9]—that blends the features of

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[9] Frederick Garber's book is entitled *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Encounter*, and discusses much of the poetry referred to in the present study. For my purposes, "encounter poem" is a more specific term with a narrower definition: the encounters in question are with old/decrepit/wasted men, and are acutely disturbing for Wordsworth, challenges in which the poet's ordinary connection to the external world seems threatened. I locate three such encounters in the Great Decade: *Resolution and Independence*, and the Discharged Soldier and

the other two. In encounter poetry, there is a suggestion of—an intimation of— transcendence, but physical reality is not finally eclipsed by the metaphorical insights associated with the egotistical sublime; similarly, encounter poems are not traumatic but rather vaguely unsettling. Preliminary encounter poetry dates from the period of the earliest work on *The Prelude*—Wordsworth was working on what would become the Discharged Soldier episode in 1799—but this type of verse like the egotistical sublime does not find its way into the Two-Part *Prelude*. Encounter poetry, it seems, must first become an independent form, and this does not happen until the composition of *Resolution and Independence* in 1802. With the completion of this work Wordsworth will have displaced the terrors of his Real encounter onto three separate kinds of poetry. Compelled to repeat, to return to the Real, Wordsworth in the 1805 *Prelude* offers three different defenses against the trauma that threatens to surface. *Tintern Abbey* protected Wordsworth from the trauma poetry of 1798, and vice versa; in the 1805 *Prelude* another buttress is added to the edifice: the moment of encounter with such figures as the Discharged Soldier and the Blind Beggar. This chapter will examine the trauma of the Two-Part *Prelude* and the encounter with the leech-gatherer in *Resolution and Independence* as stages on the way to the articulation of all three forms in the 1805 *Prelude*. Despite the many revisions this great work will undergo in the ensuing thirty-five years, the mutually dependent coexistence of trauma poetry, encounter poetry, and the egotistical sublime in 1805 is the last major refinement of Wordsworth's network of defenses against the Real.

Trauma Made Personal: The Two-Part *Prelude* of 1799

The first version of *The Prelude* is divided into two parts of roughly equal length, Part I dealing with early childhood and Part II discussing adolescence. The moments of trauma are all in Part I, suggesting that by our early teens we have been liberated from the terrors associated with them. In Part I we have a concentrated repetition of the frightening imagery of the Salisbury Plain poems, as well as the later

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Blind Beggar episodes of *The Prelude*, which will be discussed in chapter five.

trauma poems *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*, as screen memories of early childhood become repositories for the traumatic element of Wordsworth's early verse. Assigning trauma to memory is a helpful defense, but the thick cluster of repressive imagery is uncongenial to Wordsworth, and the traumatic parts of the Two-Part *Prelude* will be dispersed throughout the more substantial body of the 1805 version, being assigned to sections of Books I, V, and XI. (It is no accident that the nonthreatening Part II of the 1799 *Prelude* will be transcribed faithfully—apart from minor revisions—as Book II in 1805.)

The Two-Part *Prelude* begins with a question:

> Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
> And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams? (I. 1-6)

This question is rephrased over the course of the following twenty lines, but the identity of the "this" in line one is never made clear. When this passage is transferred to the 1805 *Prelude*, the question is made explicit: did Nature select Wordsworth as a favored being, and go to the trouble of being an influence formative of his personality, only to have the poet grow up to fail to write *The Recluse*, the philosophical poem he and Coleridge had been planning? Wordsworth began the first version of *The Prelude* in Goslar in October 1798, and one of the tasks intended for the trip to Germany was work on *The Recluse*. Though an uncommonly distinguished example, *The Prelude* thus belongs to the category of poems ostensibly about writer's block. In my opinion, the Two-Part *Prelude* originates in a general repetition compulsion, as well as in a more specific anxiety about the inaccuracies of *Tintern Abbey*.

In attempting to answer the question with which the poem opens, Wordsworth turns to a detailed examination of his childhood, and speculates on the influence Nature may have had on him. He supposes that there are two distinct ways one's personality may be formed by Nature in early childhood:

I believe
That there are spirits which, when they would form
A favored being, from his very dawn
Of infancy do open out the clouds
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentle visitation—quiet powers,
Retired, and seldom recognized, yet kind,
And to the very meanest not unknown—
With me, though rarely, in my boyish days
They communed. Others too there are, who use,
Yet haply aiming at the self-same end,
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable—and of their school was I. (I. 68-80)

The roots of this distinction relate to *Peter Bell*'s Spirits of the Mind: good men can feel the soul of Nature, and see things as they are, but a scoundrel like Peter Bell needs a violent visitation in order to change for the better. There is here—as in *Peter Bell*, begun only a few months earlier—an identification with the character of Peter Bell, reflecting a need for punishment; but of course it does not make sense for a small child to be punished for the sins of an adult, so Wordsworth does not offer an explanation for why he as a child would have needed "severer interventions." Instead we move quickly to a famous example:

They guided me: one evening led by them
I went alone into a shepherd's boat,
A skiff, that to a willow-tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home.
The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on
Just like a man who walks with stately step
Though bent on speed. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure. Not without the voice
Of mountain echoes did my boat move on,
Leaving behind her still on either side
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,

Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. A rocky steep uprose
Above the cavern of the willow-tree,
And now, as suited one who proudly rowed
With his best skill, I fixed a steady view
Upon the top of that same craggy ridge,
The bound of the horizon—for behind
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; twenty times
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And as I rose upon the stroke my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan—
When from behind that rocky steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge cliff,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Upreared its head. I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measured motion, like a living thing
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went with grave
And serious thoughts; and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
There was a darkness—call it solitude,
Or blank desertion—no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams. (I. 81-129)

We recall here that it is Peter Bell's superstition which provokes his conversion—his ability to interpret miners working underground as a

vengeful earth preparing to swallow him. Convinced that he is going to be punished, he sees perfectly normal phenomena as supernatural indicators of his imminent doom. Similarly the tricks of perspective allow a child already feeling guilty for his crime to imagine himself being pursued by an inanimate punisher. To paraphrase Peter Bell himself, the very mountain follows him, so huge has been his wickedness. Of course both crime and punishment are a pale repressive reflection of those relating to Peter Bell. To steal (or borrow) a boat is mischievous rather than evil, and the palpable ministry of the natural world is simply, it would seem, intended to teach the child a lesson. Similarly nonthreatening are the "huge and mighty forms" that haunt the young Wordsworth after the experience. The genealogy here is relatively straightforward: these huge and mighty forms are based on the Spirits of the Mind, which are based on the "mind's phantoms" in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, which is Wordsworth's original term for the Real as he experienced it on Salisbury Plain in 1793. Each layer of reinterpretation is a layer of language, of protection against the Real moment of Salisbury Plain, and of course what Wordsworth recalls having experienced as a child has been stripped of much of the terror it held in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*: rather than a devastating trance we have trembling hands. Wordsworth's childhood crime is more of a misdemeanor, and he is chided rather than really punished. The stakes here are not very high, thanks to the timely intervention of the screen memory.

The Boat Stealing episode is one of the central examples of childhood trauma in all version of *The Prelude*, but is notable in that its specific imagery does not have its source in Wordsworth's earlier verse. Following this episode there is a passage of some seventy lines in which, in a fascinating concentration, most of the key imagery of the 1798 trauma poems, as well as the Salisbury Plain poems, is repeated in a different form, as Wordsworth rehearses two separate screen memories to protect himself from the terrors of his own early poetry. First is what has become known as the Drowned Man episode:

> Ere I had seen
> Eight summers—and 'twas in the very week
> When I was first transplanted to thy vale,
> Beloved Hawkshead; when thy paths, thy shores

And brooks, were like a dream of novelty
To my half-infant mind—I chanced to cross
One of those open fields which, shaped like ears,
Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's lake.
Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
I saw distinctly on the opposite shore,
Beneath a tree and close by the lake side,
A heap of garments, as if left by one
Who there was bathing. Half an hour I watched
And no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
Grew dark with all the shadows on its breast,
And now and then a leaping fish disturbed
The breathless stillness. The succeeding day
There came a company, and in their boat
Sounded with iron hooks and with long poles.
At length the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face. I might advert
To numerous accidents in flood or field,
Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows,
Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
Of rural history, that impressed my mind
With images to which in following years
Far other feelings were attached—with forms
That yet exist with independent life,
And, like their archetypes, know no decay. (I. 258-87)

The text behind this poetry is *Peter Bell*, and there are a number of particularities about this memory that make it a suitable defense against that trauma poem. The main common ground between *Peter Bell* and the Drowned Man passage is of course that a dead body is brought to the surface of a body of water. But in *Peter Bell* this is acutely traumatic for Wordsworth's protagonist, rivaling the gibbet scene in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* in its psychic intensity. Though Peter Bell is finally spared an encounter with the Real, his moment at the Swale is potent enough that he is driven into a trance. In transferring this work's psychic energy to the story of his own life, Wordsworth finds the plot elements of *Peter Bell* too close for comfort, too close to the Real, and

the childhood memory is unconsciously selected (and perhaps revised) accordingly. In the trauma poem it is the character of Peter Bell – the Wordsworth-figure – that brings the dead man to the surface with his staff; and the young Wordsworth of *The Prelude* is of course spared this unpleasant task.

Though it is apparently Wordsworth who discovers the garments of the drowned man, he does not specifically say he was present (though we must assume he was) for the hideous spectacle when the corpse "bolt upright / Rose with his ghastly face." If, as Freud says of screen memories, something is not quite right, in this case what seems to be missing is the nine year-old Wordsworth's reaction to the surfacing of the corpse. This is remarkable, since the apparent reason for bringing up the story of the Drowned Man is that such incidents "impressed my mind / With images to which in following years / Far other feelings were attached." Feelings other than *what*? Taking *Peter Bell* again as a comparative example, the dead body in the Swale provokes an emotional response in Peter so intense that it causes a loss of consciousness, but Wordsworth's emotions here are hidden. We would presume that such an experience would be extremely emotional for a nine year-old, bringing with it perhaps something like the Spirits of the Mind (or mind's phantoms, or whatever we call it), but the feelings Wordsworth experienced – or believes he experienced – as the body with its ghastly face broke the surface of the lake are not voiced, perhaps because they are in some way suggestive of the Real as encountered on Salisbury Plain in 1793. Peter Bell is allowed to encounter something very similar to the Real, but this is because Peter Bell is not William Wordsworth, and in the trauma poem the device of fiction is sufficient to keep the trauma at a distance.

Immediately following the Drowned Man passage in the Two-Part *Prelude* is the first version of one of Wordsworth's most famous concepts, and an equally famous illustrative example:

> There are in our existence spots of time
> *Which with distinct preeminence retain*
> A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
> By trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds –
> Especially the imaginative power –

Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
Such moments chiefly seem to have their date
In our first childhood. I remember well
('Tis of an early season that I speak,
The twilight of rememberable life),
While I was yet an urchin, one who scarce
Could hold a bridle, with ambitious hopes
I mounted, and we rode towards the hills.
We were a pair of horsemen: honest James
Was with me, my encourager and guide.
We had not travelled long ere some mischance
Disjoined me from my comrade, and, through fear
Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A man, the murderer of his wife, was hung
In irons. Mouldered was the gibbet-mast;
The bones were gone, the iron and the wood;
Only a long green ridge of turf remained
Whose shape was like a grave. I left the spot,
And reascending the bare slope I saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. It was in truth
An ordinary sight, but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon on the lonely eminence,
The woman and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (I. 288-327)

A number of previous Wordsworth poems are crowded in the background of this dense passage. The "fructifying" effect (revised to "renovating" (XI. 259) for the 1805 version) ascribed to the spots of time

is reminiscent of the language of *Tintern Abbey*, with its suggestion that the recollection of the Wye valley has protected the poet from the din of towns and cities. It is worth noting, though, that this process is accomplished "invisibly," mysteriously, and there is at this point no indication of moving beyond nourishment and repair to anything as sophisticated as the egotistical sublime.

The specific imagery of this passage is suggestive of traumatic earlier poems by Wordsworth. The coming upon the scene of a gibbeting of course recalls *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. The naked pool makes one think of *The Thorn* (and perhaps *Peter Bell*, though the body of water in that work is a river), and so does the ridge of turf shaped like a grave. In this passage, Wordsworth does report having been afraid—and certainly this would not be an abnormal reaction from a child of five—but the features of the memory are stripped of most of the traumatic potency they have in their literary originals. Indeed it is the separation from "honest James," rather than anything else in the experience, that seems to frighten the young Wordsworth. The pool is simply a pool, and there is no reason to suspect that a baby has been drowned in it (though perhaps the girl struggling against the wind suggests Martha Ray as encountered in the storm); similarly the ridge of turf, like the mound in *The Thorn*, might resemble a grave, but so might any number of other natural phenomena, and as far as we know there is no particular story attached to this object, as with the stories about Martha Ray. Then there is the gibbet, remarkable for its absence: the iron and wood are gone, as well as the bones they encased. Any such encounter as the one described in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* would have occurred in the distant past, long before the birth of the child. As it is, this scene becomes a non-encounter with a gibbet; indeed with nothing present indicating an execution, we must wonder if the significance of the valley bottom is even known to the five year-old Wordsworth at the time of the original encounter.

The process of repression here is relatively straightforward. Writing in Goslar in 1798, Wordsworth asks himself how he has come to be the poet he is, and why he is not working on *The Recluse*. Much of Wordsworth's poetic career has been a defensive response to the Real trauma of 1793, but this is not a realization that can come to consciousness; so in answering his question Wordsworth turns unconsciously to poems (*Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, *Peter Bell*, and

The Thorn) which circle about the Real in particularly intense ways; and he selects childhood memories—screen memories—structurally similar to, but far less menacing than, these earlier works, as repositories for developmental trauma. At this point in his poetic development Wordsworth is able to acknowledge trauma as a part (indeed a necessary part) of his emotional development; but why trauma is necessary is not completely spelled out at this time, and the relationship between childhood and adulthood remains essentially ambiguous. The failure of the Two-Part *Prelude*, from a developmental perspective, is that it does not go beyond adolescence to a discussion of adulthood. The reason for this is that Wordsworth is not yet able to integrate childhood trauma and the egotistical sublime into a single coherent model of emotional growth. This is part of the reason the first definition of spots of time is so vague. The necessary bridge from trauma to the sublime is the encounter poem, and Wordsworth is already at work on this form in 1799 with the earliest version of the Discharged Soldier episode; but it will be will be with *Resolution and Independence*, a work from 1802, that this type of poetry finds its mature form.

Resolution and Independence: Birth of the Encounter Poem

A number of distinguished critics have written about *Resolution and Independence*. To speak very generally we might say that the critics have tended to focus on the "fluidity" of the poem, on the way subtle changes of elements such as verb tense and diction serve to create a sense of spontaneity. Geoffrey H. Hartman's influential reading is consistent with this, seeing the poem's syntactic dynamism as illustrating "a living mind open to the terror of discontinuity" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 268). David Perkins sees the poem as a brilliant illustration of Wordsworth's "middle style, neither artless nor elevated" (223), which allows him to switch easily from complex philosophical musing to simple observation. The effect of such transitions is that the poem "ripples with unpredictable motions of spontaneous consciousness" (224). In Harold Bloom's reading the encounter with the leech-gatherer leads to a sudden and unexpected

experience of the Imagination, one which will give the poet the ability to be resolute and independent (*Visionary Company* 165). I see my own reading as broadly consistent with this tradition of scholarship. In my case I see the various modulations of style as symptomatic of anxiety about the status of the leech-gatherer, who is bound up for Wordsworth with the Real sublime of 1793. A key to my reading, not often discussed in the context of *Resolution and Independence*, will be the sudden resurfacing of Annette Vallon in 1802.

It was nearly two years after Wordsworth and his sister met the former leech-gatherer that the poet got around to composing *Resolution and Independence*. Given a psychoanalytic perspective, we would tend to look for a repressive need for composition in 1802 that did not exist in 1800; and indeed in the year Wordsworth wrote this poem there were a number of peculiar stresses on the poet, chiefly relating to the three most important women in his life. There was first of all the engagement and imminent marriage to his childhood friend Mary Hutchinson. As the date of the wedding drew closer, there was the question of how Wordsworth's bride would be integrated into a household including his sister Dorothy, to whom he was intensely attached. In the end, of course, Dorothy and Mary would become extremely close, but at the time these anxieties resulted in an uncommonly tense wedding day (especially for the poet's sister). As if these familial logistics were not problematic enough, Annette Vallon suddenly reentered the picture. In late 1801, England and France were busily negotiating an end to the war that had raged for nearly a decade. By December, letters between the two countries were possible, and in March of 1802 the Peace of Amiens was declared, allowing travel across the Channel. In August Wordsworth and Dorothy traveled to Calais to meet Annette and his daughter Caroline, and to provide for the child's future maintenance. The trip to France in fact forced a postponement of the marriage, which finally took place on October 4. Wordsworth evidently felt things needed to be put in order with his French family before taking his English bride.

What does any of this have to do with a poem about meeting a leech-gatherer? At a first glance, not much. More than anything else, *Resolution and Independence* is one of the great poems in the English language about moods, and more specifically their origins and transitions. The speaker's mood (and again, the speaker appears to be

Wordsworth himself) at the beginning of the poem is joyful: he is one with the natural world, as happy as a child. (Think *Tintern Abbey*.) Then, inexplicably, "as it sometimes chanceth" (22), his spirits plummet, and he wonders if he will meet the same unfortunate fate as his poetic forebears Chatterton and Burns. Wordsworth's explanation for this change, as we shall see, is vague and unconvincing, suggesting that he himself is not sure why his mood changes. Biographically a connection with Annette Vallon is relatively easy to draw. Wordsworth, in discussing *Resolution and Independence*, describes having felt a similar feeling of dejection while on the road in 1802. Mary Moorman claims this occurred on April 7, as the poet was on his way to see Mary Hutchinson. This was no ordinary visit, for at the end of March, Dorothy Wordsworth reports, she and William had reached a momentous decision regarding his responsibilities in France: "We resolved...to see Annette, and that William should go to Mary" (qtd. in Moorman 1: 555). Mary certainly knew about the existence of Annette, but Wordsworth on April 7 would have been on his way to break some difficult news: not only was he going to visit his former lover, but this trip would temporarily delay his and Mary's nuptials. It was on this occasion, on his way to see "sweet Mary," that Wordsworth claims to have experienced a mood swing like that delineated in *Resolution and Independence*, happiness suddenly devolving into a sadness that needs comforting.

Certainly the news he had to deliver to his beloved is more than enough reason to provoke the kind of depression seen in the poem about the leech-gatherer; but if Mary will be disturbed by the Annette Vallon of 1802, for Wordsworth it is also (and more importantly) the Annette of ten years earlier—related as she was in the poet's mind with the Real sublime—who continues to disturb him, to provoke his verse (though not consciously). Throughout *Resolution and Independence* the pain connected with the Salsibury Plain experience threatens to resurface, and it is through the screen memory of meeting the leech-gatherer—and crucially through the medium of language—that Wordsworth is defended against this eventuality. The memory of the leech-gather, significantly altered (assuming we can trust Dorothy's journal entry), both unconsciously protects the poet from an immediate psychic threat, and also looks ahead to the encounter poem's

integration into the most sophisticated defense of all, the full-length *Prelude* completed in 1805.

As the Scenes at the beginning of this chapter indicate, Wordsworth seems to remember the meeting with the former leech-gatherer inaccurately, but we might question whether this is more a matter of poetic license than repression. Wordsworth seems to need to see the old man as more resolute and independent than he actually was, glossing over the fact that he had been forced into a life of begging; this independence became more pronounced as the poem was revised (Harrison 349). Also, in moving from the first version of the poem (usually called *The Leech-Gatherer*, and of which we do not have a complete version) to its published form, there is an increased focus on the speaker's mental processes in contemplating the leech-gatherer. As Gene W. Ruoff notes: "While the earlier formulation had centered on the old man's being, the revision shifts its attention to the speaker's perceptions. What the man is in himself is now subordinated to what he appears to be to the observer who spies him" (146). It will be in Wordsworth's perceptions of the old man, and especially in the uses he makes of these perceptions, that *Resolution and Independence* finds its identity as an encounter poem.

Resolution and Independence opens with a typically Wordsworthian description of a placid natural scene, a scene the speaker at first sees himself as a part of:

> There was a roaring in the wind all night;
> The rain came heavily and fell in floods;
> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
> The birds are singing in the distant woods;
> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
> The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
> And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.
>
> All things that love the sun are out of doors;
> The sky rejoices in the morning's birth;
> The grass is bright with rain-drops;—on the moors
> The hare is running races in her mirth;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,

Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

I was a Traveller then upon the moor;
I saw the hare that raced about with joy;
I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:
The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy. (1-21)

In Nature one finds happiness. An obvious comparison would be with *Tintern Abbey*. And yet there is a strange reversal of that poem's energy. In *Tintern Abbey* it is the memory of a natural scene which shields the poet from the din of towns and cities. Here, the experience of Nature is in the present, and protects the poet from his old remembrances (which may or may not have to do with the din of towns and cities). If the virtue of Nature in *Tintern Abbey* is dependent on memory, here Nature is seemingly instrumental in a necessary *forgetting*. But what is forgotten? "The ways of men, so vain and melancholy." This is extraordinarily vague in a way that the language of *Tintern Abbey* is not. This is the first of a few examples in *Resolution and Independence* where there is the suggestion of something that can not be put into words. This something is the trauma of the Real sublime, which Wordsworth once again seeks to protect himself from with the natural world. Unlike in *Tintern Abbey*, though, Nature can not answer the task the poet assigns it, and the old remembrances almost immediately resurface. (There is a sense of an immediate threat in this poem not present in the earlier work, which may be seen in the abrupt switch to past tense at the beginning of the third stanza.)

In the fourth stanza the speaker's delight in Nature disappears:

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds than can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low;
To me that morning did it happen so;
And fears and fancies thick upon me came;

Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.
(22-28)

The logic here seems to be that happiness sows the seeds of its own destruction: joy runs up against some sort of natural maximum, and the consequence of this is a profound depression. It will of course be up to the individual reader to determine if this description of a mood swing rings true. To this reader, "I was too happy to be happy" sounds like a suspect cover for a more insidious cause for dejection. Looking for the trauma of the Real behind the words of this poem, one must be struck by the thoughts the speaker "knew not, nor could name." The challenge the Real presents to the Symbolic is to name the unnameable. In the end this sort of difficulty will be met—Wordsworth can call his Real trauma trimethylamine if he wants, or anything else—but this was not clear at the onset of the disturbance described in the poem.

In the following two stanzas the speaker struggles to give a name to his anxieties:

I heard the sky-lark warbling in the sky;
And I bethought me of the playful hare:
Even such a happy Child of earth am I;
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare;
Far from the world I walk, and from all care;
But there may come another day to me—
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
As if life's business were a summer mood;
As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good;
But how can He expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all? (29-42)

In analyzing Wordsworth's repression, the key word here, appropriately capitalized, is "Child," echoing the earlier claim that he was "as happy as a boy." There is a potent desire to regress here, to be free of the many conflicts of adulthood. Considering 1793 and 1802 as

the most stressful times in the poet's relationship with Annette Vallon, we again think of the arguments of *Tintern Abbey*, of the need to see the 1793 Wordsworth as childlike. If it is implausible to see a twenty-three year-old as a child, it is more so with a man of thirty-two. Of course the mere selection of the word "Child" is not in itself so significant, but there are other things in these stanzas reflective of repression. Wordsworth summarizes his fears for the future as "Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty." One does not need to know very much about Wordsworth's biography to know that by the age of thirty-two the poet has experienced more than his share of all these things. Then there is the astonishing statement at the beginning of stanza six: "My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought." This is reminiscent of the Female Vagrant's statement in *Salisbury Plain*: "'The suns of eighteen summers danced along / Joyous as in the pleasant morn of May'" (253-54). As with the Female Vagrant, we would be tempted to see Wordsworth's statement as symptomatic of a need to repress any number of stresses associated with adulthood. But one need not be a psychologist to find Wordsworth's portrait of himself unrealistic. Again, we need only the barest acquaintance with his biography. We can consider that the poet was orphaned at an early age; spent years separated from his beloved sister Dorothy; was thoroughly disillusioned by the French Revolution; fathered an illegitimate daughter he was unable to meet for ten years; and (at the time he made the statement) had just postponed his wedding in order to go to France and make things right with Annette and their daughter.

But we do not have to resort to biography to doubt Wordsworth's claim of uninterrupted happiness. If his "whole life" has been occupied by "pleasant thought," then what are we to make of the dejection described in stanza four, the fears and fancies, the blind thoughts? Wordsworth clearly says that the depression he is experiencing is not a unique or new occurrence, that he feels this way "sometimes." There is obviously something contradictory about saying, "I have never been unhappy, but I *fear* that someday I will be." As with the statement in *Tintern Abbey* that in 1793 he was one with Nature, Wordsworth is protesting too much. Taken together, the description of the current depressed mood in stanza four, and the characterization of the poet's life in general in stanzas five and six, combine to paint a rather amazing picture: Wordsworth says *while in the midst of depression*

that he has been happy his entire life, and he claims that this depression is caused *by being too happy.* There is behind this double paradox a need to deny the existence of the mood that occasions the poem, and also to claim that he is the victim of too much of a good thing. His mood is in actuality related to the Real sublime, and the inability to come to terms with this—or even really to describe it—results in contradiction and vagueness.

In the first six stanzas of *Resolution and Independence,* the speaker has not identified himself, other than as a "Traveller." In stanza seven, as Wordsworth labors under the pressure to give a name to his depression, the vocation of poet suddenly becomes foregrounded:

> I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
> The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride;
> Of Him who walked in glory and in joy
> Following his plough, along the mountain-side:
> By our own spirits are we deified:
> We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
> But thereof come in the end despondency and madness. (43-49)

In defending himself against pain associated with the Real, it is quite understandable that Wordsworth would here make an Imaginary identification with being a poet, part of a brotherhood of the Symbolic, even as he seemingly contemplates an uncertain future. But Chatterton and Burns are interesting choices as poets who came to a bad end. They have in common that they died young—Burns at thirty-six and Chatterton at the spectacularly Romantic seventeen—and more importantly for Wordsworth that they died poverty-stricken. Chatterton's story was the stuff of legend even in Wordsworth's time: starving in London, he had taken arsenic and water rather than accept charity, literally "perishing in his pride." If Chatterton was some kind of emblem for Rash Youth, Burns was Dissipation, squandering health and money in the pursuit of pleasure, and fearing near the end of his life that he would be jailed for nonpayment of a haberdasher's bill.[10]

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[10] A commonplace of *Resolution and Independence* criticism is that—along with Chatterton and Burns—Wordsworth is thinking of Coleridge as a poet susceptible to "despondency and madness." Gene W. Ruoff's

These two poets had indeed experienced "solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty," with the accent on the final item on the list. Though Wordsworth talks about despondency and madness, the concerns here would appear to be primarily economic: how does a poet provide for himself? Wordsworth has lived his life as if all needful things would come unsought, but what if he should turn out like Burns and Chatterton? In a letter from 1837, he remarked of these poets that "in the temperament of the two...there was something that however favourable had been their circumstances, however much they had been encouraged and supported, would have brought on their ruin" (6: 500). Burns' story in particular served as a cautionary tale for Wordsworth, a tale given a concrete form in 1803 when he and his sister visited the dead poet's unmarked grave. Hearing local stories about the financial problems of Burns' surviving children, Dorothy tells us, "filled us with melancholy concern, which had a kind of connexion with ourselves" (*Journals* 1: 202).

An important text in the background of *Resolution and Independence* is Burns' "Despondency: An Ode" (Ruoff 125-26), which Wordsworth said he could not read "without the deepest agitation." The conclusion in particular resonates strongly with Wordsworth's poem:

> O enviable early days,
> When dancing thoughtless pleasure's maze,
> To care, to guilt unknown!
> How ill exchang'd for riper times,
> To feel the follies, or the crimes,
> Of others, or my own!
> Ye tiny elves that guiltless sport,
> Like linnets in the bush,
> Ye little know what ills ye court,
> When manhood is your wish!
> The losses, the crosses,
> That active man engage;

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book, which interprets *Resolution and Independence* as part of an intertextual conversation between Wordsworth and Coleridge, discusses Coleridge's influence on this poem at length.

The fears all, the tears all,
Of dim declining age! (57-70)

Burns describes the future that Wordsworth fears, and looks back to the primal state that Wordsworth claims to embody. Burns is more accurate than Wordsworth about the loss of innocence: the "tiny elves" he speaks to are of course children. Wordsworth may call himself a "happy Child of earth," and compare himself to the hare as Burns compares the happy children to the linnet in the bush, but of course we know he has as many things to be despondent about as Burns, or any adult. The economic concerns he associates with Chatterton and Burns, legitimate though they might be, in fact screen a more basic anxiety related to the Real, bound up with the still unresolved Annette Vallon situation. In reality Wordsworth's financial situation at the time he composed *Resolution and Independence* had never been better. The death of Lonsdale, on May 24, 1802, while Wordsworth was at work on the poem, finally set the wheels in motion that would give the poet his inheritance. The man who had left France destitute in 1792, despairing of being able to provide for his child, would this year be able to make arrangements to do just that. With respect to poverty, Wordsworth is thinking more of a past than a future self, and behind the image of that past self is the traumatic encounter with the Real.

It is at this point, ostensibly considering future despondency and madness, that Wordsworth comes upon the leech-gatherer. (As with the tense shift at the beginning of the poem, the relationship here between 1800 and 1802 is somewhat murky. I take the despondent mood of the poem as belonging to 1802—April 7, if we must be specific—and of course the screen memory of the actual leech-gatherer is nearly two years old at this point. Wordsworth freely blends past and present, just as he has no scruples about reinterpreting the actual meeting to suit his poetic purposes.) Upon our first glimpse of this character it is suggested that he is providentially there to help the poet with his problems:

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
A leading from above, a something given,
Yet it befell that, in this lonely place,
When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,

Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares:
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself;

Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep—in his extreme old age:
His body was bent double, feet and head
Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood:
And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
And moveth all together, if it move at all.

At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
Upon the muddy water, which he conned,
As if he had been reading in a book:
And now a stranger's privilege I took;
And, drawing to his side, to him did say,
"This morning gives us promise of a glorious day." (50-84)

Wordsworth describes his first impression of the old man as one of inscrutability, wondering how he could have come to be at the side of

the pool (and using the famous sea-beast comparison). Though the appearance of an old man stirring the water with his staff may strike the poet as something of a mystery, this scene is an obvious choice as a defense against the trauma of the Real sublime, repeating as it does the imagery of the earlier trauma poetry. The "pool bare to the eye of heaven" is the pond of *The Thorn*, suggesting also the Swale in *Peter Bell*. The old man stirring the muddy water of the pool with his staff represents Peter Bell, using his staff to bring the body of the dead man to the surface. This scene, a composite of similar ones in the two trauma poems of 1798, is less menacing than either. The pond in *The Thorn* may have been the instrument of a murder, and, according to local superstition, the scene of a frightening apparition. The old man in *Resolution and Independence* will not see a baby gazing at him through the waters, and will not find a corpse with his staff. What the result of his gazing into the water *will* be is not immediately clear, but even on a first glance Wordsworth is soothed by the Symbolic overtones of his impression that the old man looked at the water "As if he had been reading in a book"; similar imagery had been used to describe Peter Bell's gazing upon the Swale, but in that case it had been "A book that is enchanted," suggesting a supernaturalism absent in *Resolution and Independence*. In sum, this scene in comparison to the 1798 trauma poetry has been stripped of much of its ability to terrify. (This—as with the traumatic imagery of the Two-Part *Prelude*—is a necessary step preparatory to encounter poetry's insertion in the full-length *Prelude* of 1805.) The psychic residue of Peter Bell's trance may be seen in the old man's eerie motionlessness, which is of course only momentary and not reflective of any particular enervation.

The old man responds politely to Wordsworth's small talk about the weather, and then the poet moves quickly to the important question:

> A gentle answer did the old Man make,
> In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew:
> And him with further words I thus bespake,
> "What occupation do you there pursue?
> This is a lonesome place for one like you."
> Ere he replied, a flash of mild surprise
> Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes.

His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
But each in solemn order followed each,
With something of a lofty utterance drest—
Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men; a stately speech;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

He told, that to these waters he had come
To gather leeches, being old and poor:
Employment hazardous and wearisome!
And he had many hardships to endure:
From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor;
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance;
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance. (85-105)

It is in the difference between Wordsworth's poetic account of the man and his sister's journal entry that we may see the emotional needs that force this screen memory into its particular shape. The actual person the siblings met on October 3, 1800 was a *former* leech-gatherer driven to begging by the scarcity of leeches and his own decrepitude. But this characterization would obviously not make for a very good portrait of resolution and independence. In the poem, the old man is described as feeble and leeches are said to be scarce, but *somehow* he is able to persevere in his activity. The uneasiness of the movement from factual dependence to fictional independence may be seen in the first draft of the poem, where the old man is still able to gather leeches, but only in the summer. (In the winter he sells "godly Books," something the actual leech-gatherer did in addition to begging.)

Why select the most dependent sort of man, a beggar, as one's symbol for independence? Dorothy's account of the man can perhaps for our purposes be taken as objective; unfortunately we do not know her brother's immediate impression of the actual meeting. Evidently something about the man's destitute condition struck Wordsworth, but the specifics of this will perhaps remain murky. Dennis Grunes suggests that it is paradoxically the old man's feebleness that leads to his selection as an emblem of the opposite quality: "[T]he ample evidence of vulnerability to which the actual man's condition testified

must have inspired in Wordsworth a contrary wish for an indomitable figure of uncomplaining affirmation, as if to deny the evidence" (342). But why would such a wish be necessary? There is obviously the question of identification: Wordsworth fears (or says he fears) that as he gets older he will fall prey to the despondency and madness of Chatterton and Burns, and in the leech-gatherer of the poem we have an older man (though not a poet, as far as we know) who is neither despondent nor mad. I would like to suggest that if Wordsworth *wants* to identify with the leech-gatherer as depicted in *Resolution and Independence*, in reality it is the actual man of the 1800 meeting whom the poet sees himself as. It must be kept in mind that, inasmuch as *Resolution and Independence* finds its genesis in the sudden reappearance of the Annette Vallon issue, this poem is more properly thought of in the context of Wordsworth's life in 1792 than in 1802. As discussed in detail in chapter three, the Wordsworth who left his pregnant lover at Orléans in 1792 was haunted by precisely the sort of economic concerns ("How will I provide for myself, my wife, my unborn child?") that confront the leech-gatherer. I have argued that the relationship with Annette Vallon came to be associated in Wordsworth's mind with the Real encounter of 1793. Looking at *Resolution and Independence* in this light, it is not difficult to see why Wordsworth's unconscious would find a consideration of finances a very palatable screen for the trauma of the Real. Poverty can be devastating (Chatterton and Burns being cases in point), but can also be escaped. A decrepit old man can support himself by collecting leeches (in the poem, anyway), and a thirty-two year-old poet can come into his inheritance. That Wordsworth is finally in a position to provide for Caroline's future maintenance is all the proof we need that the pressures of poverty are not insurmountable. But the story of the Real has no such happy ending: though the Real encounter of 1793 does not itself recur, Wordsworth is compelled to repeat, to anxiously return to its vicinity. Wordsworth writes about poverty in this poem because unconsciously he wishes the Real were as easily escaped as money problems.

However we choose to read *Resolution and Independence*, there is something a bit improbable in the poetic description of the old man. Throughout his feebleness is stressed, and we bring to mind the speaker's first impression: "The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs." Can we realistically picture such a man continuing such an

arduous labor as leech-gathering? We recall Freud's characterization of his own screen memory, that something was not quite right. In the manner of a caricature, the old man's function in the poem is strangely appropriate: in a world where maximum happiness leads to maximum unhappiness, where the gladness of the young poet of necessity ("thereof") causes later madness, it is perhaps not so surprising to see a decrepit old man able to make a living at such a physically demanding occupation. Wordsworth takes a beggar who had formerly been a leech-gatherer, and transforms him into a man who not only still gathers leeches, but is in the process of doing so *right now*. Again we think of money problems as a repressive screen for the Real: if such a man as the leech-gatherer can provide for himself, then clearly *anyone* can.

It is immediately in the wake of the leech-gatherer's description of his occupation that *Resolution and Independence* identifies itself as an encounter poem:

> The old Man still stood talking by my side;
> But now his voice to me was like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
> And the whole body of the Man did seem
> Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
> Or like a man from some far region sent,
> To send me human strength, by apt admonishment. (106-12)

Partly because of the brilliant parodies of Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear, this stanza is probably the most famous instance in English letters of a character not listening to what is said to him. But this is not simple absentmindedness or a lack of concentration on Wordsworth's part. The poet's mood of uneasiness through the early stanzas of the poem is grounded in an unconscious anxiety that the Real will resurface, and there is something in the old man's speech (or so it seems) that intensifies this anxiety. The symptom of this is a failure of language, a Symbolic breakdown: "nor word from word could I divide." It is not that the speaker stops paying attention, but rather that he momentarily *loses the ability* to pay attention. This phenomenon is not dissimilar to the Real, but of course Wordsworth is not devastated like his prototypical Real sufferer, the Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*.

Wordsworth had defensively split the Real of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* into trauma poetry and the poetry of the egotistical sublime, and in *Resolution and Independence* the features of these other two types of verse recombine in a less menacing and/or intense way than in their original unity in the poem of Salisbury Plain. In the trauma poetry of 1798 (and behind it *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*) there is a horrifying, debilitating, trance-inducing encounter; in encounter poetry we have a vague sense of unease—a bad mood—instead of devastation. The speaker of *Resolution and Independence* will find the old man troubling rather than overwhelming. Similarly, in the egotistical sublime (and behind it the poem of Salisbury Plain) there is a transcendence of the physical world, and this is something that does not quite happen in the poem about the leech-gatherer: "the whole body of the Man did seem / Like one whom I had met with in a dream; / Or like a man from some far region sent, / To give me human strength, by apt admonishment." There is here a vague suggestion that the leech-gatherer does not belong, is a character from a dream or another world; but there is not the full Wordsworthian egotistical fadeout of external reality, no being laid asleep in body or vision of this other world. Transcendence is merely suggested, and the metaphysical insights of *Tintern Abbey* do not occur. The leech-gatherer has perhaps been sent to admonish Wordsworth ("admonished" is a crucial word in the Blind Beggar episode of the 1805 *Prelude*, another important instance of encounter poetry), but we do not discover the region from which he was sent.

Wordsworth's response to the leech-gatherer's admonishment is revealing:

> My former thoughts returned: the fear that kills;
> And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
> Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
> And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
> —Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
> My question eagerly did I renew,
> "*How is it that you live, and what is it you do?*" (113-19)

Faced with his Real anxiety, Wordsworth again chooses to interpret his unnameable fears in terms of economics and miserable dead poets. This stanza concludes with Wordsworth asking the old man how he is able

to support himself. Parodies aside, the significance of this question is that Wordsworth already knows the answer when he asks it. In stanza sixteen, Wordsworth had lost track of what the leech-gatherer was saying, but that was *after* the old man had identified his occupation. We might expect the speaker to ask the old man to repeat the portion of the speech he had missed (when the interlocutor's voice "Was like a stream / Scarce heard"); but Wordsworth at this point does not care about the transfer of information. He does not need to *know* anything, but rather "to be comforted." It was the failure of language in stanza fifteen that occasioned his anxiety, and he needs a fresh supply of words to recover his equilibrium. It does not matter what the leech-gatherer says in response to Wordsworth's eager question: as with the formula for trimethylamine in Freud's dream, the old man's words mean nothing except that they are words.

The leech-gatherer dutifully gives Wordsworth what he wants, and the poem concludes with a recovery of sorts:

> He with a smile did then his words repeat;
> And said that, gathering leeches, far and wide
> He travelled; stirring thus about his feet
> The waters of the pools where they abide.
> "Once I could meet with them on every side;
> But they have dwindled long by slow decay;
> Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may."
>
> While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
> The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me:
> In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
> About the weary moors continually,
> Wandering about alone and silently.
> While I these thoughts within myself pursued,
> He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.
>
> And soon with this he other matter blended,
> Cheerfully uttered, with demeanor kind,
> But stately in the main; and when he ended,
> I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
> In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.

"God," said I, "be my help and stay secure;
I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor." (120-40)

In stanza nineteen, Wordsworth is once more troubled by the old man's speech, but the Real crisis has passed, and the poet does not again lose his grip on language. The conclusion of the poem seems to suggest that the leech-gatherer will remain before the mind's eye of Wordsworth as an image of the resolution and independence he desires for himself. If it is unusual to look for reassurance from such a figure, it is perhaps no more so than reinterpreting a former leech-gatherer as a current leech-gatherer. There is a powerful denial at work in this poem, a need to see reality as it is not, even as its opposite: if Wordsworth is unhappy, it must be because he is too happy, and so on. Behind *Resolution and Independence* is the stuff of Wordsworth's own experience, and it is a mood of 1802 rather than a meeting of 1800 that occasions the poem. The very feebleness of the actual old man makes him an appropriate defense against the Real, and such a defense was especially needful in April of 1802, as the poet walked toward Mary Hutchinson, turned adrift into the past.

The full-length *Prelude* of 1805 obviously could not have been written in its existing form without the 1799 version of the story of the growth of the poet's mind. Less obvious in the genealogy of Wordsworth's great autobiography is *Resolution and Independence,* but it too is an important step. The encounter poem is the missing piece of the puzzle, forming a necessary bridge between the trauma poetry of early childhood (first expressed in the Two-Part *Prelude*) and the egotistical sublime of mature adulthood. In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth had made the untenable argument that, at the Wye valley at age twenty-three, Nature had been all in all. The Discharged Soldier and Blind Beggar episodes—the most important poetry of encounter in the 1805 *Prelude*—will provide a much more realistic portrait of early adulthood than the lines composed at the Wye had. In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth had tried to defend himself against the terrors of 1793 by claiming that at such an age he was too radically innocent to be susceptible of such terrors. Part of the reason he is able in 1805 to depict young adulthood in a more realistic way is that he has learned to displace its most traumatic aspect—the terror of the Real—onto screen memories of early childhood. With the development of encounter poetry, Wordsworth is

finally able to write the full version of the *Prelude*—full in the sense of moving from his earliest memories to "the present." The 1805 *Prelude* will be a three-part defense against the Real—composed of childhood trauma poetry, encounter poetry, and the egotistical sublime—and, the revisions insisted upon by Wordsworth's compulsion to repeat aside, this will be his final defense.

5. The Three Defenses Integrated: The 1805 *Prelude*

Scene 1, 1775: A five year-old child riding a horse becomes separated from his guide. Dismounting, he leads his steed down to a valley bottom, the scene in former times of an execution. The gibbet and the bones that it held are gone. All that remains is a ridge of turf shaped like a grave. Climbing back up the hill, the child sees a pool, a stone signal-beacon, and a girl with a pitcher on her head walking against the wind.

Scene 2, 1775: A five year-old child riding a horse becomes separated from his guide. Dismounting, he leads his steed down to a valley bottom, the scene in former times of an execution. The gibbet and the bones that it held are gone. All that remains is the murderer's name, carved into the turf soon after the execution. Climbing back up the hill, the child sees a pool, a stone signal-beacon, and a girl with a pitcher on her head walking against the wind.

This movement, from the 1799 Two-Part *Prelude* to the 1805 revision of the poem, is perhaps the strangest of all. The question of revision in *The Prelude* is a familiar one; there are at least seventeen substantial manuscripts of the work, some showing evidence of multiple reworkings (*The Prelude* "Preface" ix). But Wordsworth's poem is, or seems to be, an autobiography, and in the scenes quoted here, the primary difference is not in the matter of style or interpretation, but rather in the *facts* of Wordsworth's experience. Why, in one version of the recollection, is there a grave-shaped ridge and no inscribed name, and in the other a name and no ridge? Much of both versions is word for word the same, indicating that Wordsworth must have had the earlier version of the Gibbet episode in front of him as he composed the

later. Presumably he did not forget about the ridge "Whose shape was like a grave" (I. 313). Why does it disappear from the revision?

Our reading of the Two-Part *Prelude* in the previous chapter gives clues to answering this question. I argued that the 1799 Gibbet episode was a screen memory selected by Wordsworth's unconscious for inclusion in his autobiography because of its ability to bear some of the crucial imagery from his earlier traumatic poetry. In this context the ridge of turf in the first version of the above Scene suggests the mound in *The Thorn*, which is also described as resembling a grave, and which may in fact *be* the grave of Martha Ray's murdered child. In the movement from the 1799 *Prelude* to that of 1805, this traumatic image disappears, to be replaced by the murderer's name. A cursory Lacanian glance at the two Scenes would suggest that an element associated for Wordsworth with the Real sublime of Salisbury Plain is replaced by language, the stuff of the Symbolic. As with the dream of Irma's injection, the threat of the traumatic is answered by a *word*—the word that means nothing except that it is a word.

Regardless of how doggedly Lacanian we choose to make our reading, I believe it will be obvious in this chapter that in incorporating his three Real defenses (trauma poetry, encounter poetry, and the egotistical sublime) into the story of his life, Wordsworth is able to make each of them less menacing, more distant from the Real sublime of Salisbury Plain. I have already argued that *Tintern Abbey* and the trauma poetry of 1798—in their different structures and emphases—served in a sense as safety valves for one another, the elements repressed in one type of work foregrounded in the other. Compelled to return to the vicinity of the Real sublime, Wordsworth had unconsciously responded to this traumatic material with a division of labor, splitting the alienating energy of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and assigning it to two very different kinds of verse. In the 1805 *Prelude*, a third type of work—the poetry of encounter—is added to the matrix, and the psychic burden on each individual type of poetry is thereby decreased.

As we shall see, in the 1805 *Prelude* Wordsworth's three Real defenses are more confident and assured than they have ever been. At the same time they are used by Wordsworth to structure a timeline in which the most traumatic elements of his life (those closest to the Real sublime of Salisbury Plain) are relegated to a past so distant as to be

almost mythical. Wordsworth's circle always spoke of *The Prelude* (when not calling it "the poem to Coleridge") as "the poem on the growth of his mind," and certainly it is that; looked at from a Lacanian perspective, we might add that this great poem is also the chronicle of a mind's attempted escape from the Real sublime.

As discussed in the previous chapter, trauma poetry surfaces in the story of Wordsworth's life in early childhood. Wordsworth argues that traumatic moments (interpreted as the "severer interventions" of a beneficent Nature) are necessary to the development of a healthy adult personality. Given that I see the structure of the 1805 *Prelude* as in some sense a response to the traumas associated with *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, it is appropriate that the earliest memory discussed in this work (dating from an incident when Wordsworth was five years old) concerns a gibbet. Though the Gibbet episode is less menacing in 1805 than it was in the Two-Part *Prelude*, and of course far less menacing than its original source in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, there is still in this moment a sense of terror, and a description (very realistic as the reaction of a small child separated from his guide) of having to flee the scene of trauma. By the time of the Drowned Man episode (concerning a screen memory of an experience which occurred when Wordsworth was nine), there is already an indication that the time of childhood trauma is coming to an end. Confronted with the ghastly spectacle of a dead body breaking the surface of a body of water—the source poem here is *Peter Bell*—Wordsworth is able coolly to report that this experience was not frightening for him, because he had read about such things in books. What drove the adult Peter Bell into a trance does not faze the nine year old Wordsworth. This suggests that Wordsworth sees (or wants to see) his self at this age as verging on a new, higher level of consciousness.

Though the events of *Resolution and Independence* happen to a man in his early thirties, in the 1805 *Prelude* the moments of encounter are cast back further, seemingly to the border between late adolescence and early adulthood. In this sense they may be seen as a sort of developmental hinge between the traumas proper to childhood and the egotistical sublime of adulthood. The Discharged Soldier episode is in Book IV of the 1805 *Prelude*, entitled "Summer Vacation," placing the event sometime in the summer months of 1788, when Wordsworth was eighteen. Though much of the traumatic imagery of *Resolution and*

Independence (grounded primarily in *Peter Bell*) is pared away, we still feel unmistakably that the meeting with the ghastly soldier is a challenge, a *trial,* for Wordsworth. As with the leech-gatherer encounter, the poet is unnerved by the solitary man, and his normal connection to the external world seems threatened. He must confront the uncanny figure—indeed engage it in conversation—in order to regain his equilibrium. The other moment of encounter in the 1805 *Prelude* shows an older Wordsworth, more at ease in the situation. The Blind Beggar episode takes place in Book VII, "Residence in London." Wordsworth reports that after receiving his degree from Cambridge, in January of 1791, "to London first / I turned," (VII. 66-67) and since he lived in the city from January to May of that year, we can date the encounter with some confidence as having occurred at the age of twenty. In the Blind Beggar episode there is, as in that of the Discharged Soldier, a sense of being out of step with the world as normally experienced, and an encounter with an uncanny, decrepit man. But in this case the onset of the troubled mood (of the sense of feeling threatened) happens *before* the meeting with the blind beggar—Wordsworth associates it with the "thickening hubbub" (VII. 227) of London—and when the old man is encountered this actually triggers the poet's recovery. The figure of encounter is no longer seen as a threat; instead the unease these characters formerly provoked is displaced onto the big city, a typically Wordsworthian menace. As with the composure with which a dead body is met in the Drowned Man episode, this response to the blind beggar suggests that Wordsworth is in the process of evolving, of moving to the next stage on life's way.

But when exactly is Wordsworth able to experience the egotistical sublime? Like *Tintern Abbey,* the Simplon Pass episode leaves the answer to this question somewhat ambiguous. It is important to note that, as with the first visit to the Wye valley in 1793, such metaphysical insights are not possible for Wordsworth when he and Robert Jones cross the Alps in 1790. (The original experience actually occurs a few months before the Blind Beggar episode, and Wordsworth at this point is still in the transitional phase associated with encounter poetry.) The Simplon Pass episode is even less specific than was *Tintern Abbey* about when we first receive access to sublime intuition. Within the drama of the 1805 *Prelude*'s composition, of course, it seems that the sublime encounter with Imagination happens *as Wordsworth is writing*

in March 1804. It *surprises* him, perhaps suggesting that in this revisioning we do not come to the egotistical sublime until our thirties. As with trauma poetry and with poetry of encounter we will see that the depiction of the egotistical sublime in the Simplon Pass is more assured than it had previously been: here Wordsworth will show no apparent anxiety that he is the victim of a vain belief. Much of *Tintern Abbey*'s anxiety is the result of the first Wye visit's being bound up with the traumatic experience on Salisbury Plain that immediately preceded it. In the 1805 *Prelude* Wordsworth's ingenious way of foreclosing the possibility of such a connection is to link the egotistical sublime to *an event that never happened*—the missed viewing of the wonders of Simplon—and then to use this fact as an illustration of the sublime's liberty from all phenomena.

Wordsworth's three defenses against the Real sublime have become more refined by the composition of the 1805 *Prelude*, resulting in a newfound confidence in the expression of each type of poetry. Biographically it is easy to see that the common ground is the elimination of any obvious connection with Annette Vallon. Pregnancy had figured prominently in the 1798 trauma poems, and one of the Sailor's crimes in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* was the abandonment of a wife and children; such elements obviously have no connection to the small child who experiences the Gibbet and Drowned Man episodes. *Resolution and Independence* had been bound up with the sudden reemergence of the Annette Vallon issue in 1802; in the Discharged Soldier and Blind Beggar episodes the energy of the encounter poem is projected onto a time when Annette had not yet been met. Similarly *Tintern Abbey*'s clear connection to Wordsworth's horrible 1793 is traded for a reference in the Simplon Pass episode to the poet's *first* trip to the Continent.

More generally we might remark that, to the extent that the 1805 *Prelude* is the story of the growth of a mind, Wordsworth seems to have a need (perhaps unconscious) to see this story as ending prior to the poet's meeting Annette Vallon. Obviously to a limited degree later events *do* find their way into the poem—there are the French books to consider, and even the walk across Salisbury Plain is mentioned briefly in Book XII—but the events of the narrative are arranged so as to conclude with the poet's ascent (again with Robert Jones) of Mount Snowdon in the summer of 1791, a few months before his return to

France. Wordsworth would like to see the growth of his mind as a closed system ending in 1791, insulated from the psychic pressures of the Real sublime, associated for him with Annette Vallon. The tripartite developmental structure of *The Prelude* (traumatic moments giving way to moments of encounter giving way to the egotistical sublime) is instrumental in creating this illusion. The success of this structure may be seen in how consummately Annette is kept out of *The Prelude*. The only hint of Wordsworth's French family is to be found in the Vaudracour and Julia episode in Book IX. Many of the crucial elements of this story (a child is born out of wedlock, Vaudracour kills a man in passion, Julia is forced to go into a convent, their child dies while in Vaudracour's care) suggest in a less damning way *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, as well as the 1798 trauma poems. In 1805 Wordsworth still needs to confess, but seems to feel less guilty, and is able to confine his confession to a single "fictionalized" passage. As a defense against Annette Vallon, and also against the Real sublime, it is a testament to *The Prelude*'s success that the Vaudracour and Julia episode was cut from the poem entirely in 1832. The tripartite developmental structure of *The Prelude* has made this confession unnecessary, and at some point between 1805 and 1832 Wordsworth realizes this.

A Renovating Virtue? The Gibbet and Drowned Man Episodes

In considering these two episodes together, the most obvious change from the 1799 *Prelude* to that of 1805 is that Wordsworth chooses to separate them. The Drowned Man episode is placed in Book V (which Wordsworth calls "Books"), and the story of the Gibbet is delayed until Book XI ("Imagination, How Impaired and Restored"). There are obvious narrative reasons for these two passages to occupy the positions they do in the full-length *Prelude*; but beyond this there are more pressing impulses which drive Wordsworth to separate them. In 1799 they clearly comprise a unit. Both deal with particularly intense childhood encounters, and they are separated only by the famous definition of spots of time, which is as much a commentary on the Drowned Man episode as it is an introduction to the Gibbet. As I noted in my previous chapter, in 1799 these two episodes in the space of

about seventy lines repeat most of the crucial imagery of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and the 1798 trauma poetry. Behind the extended passage of 1799 is the Real sublime, and when Wordsworth interrogates these two screen memories—How has this trauma been beneficial to me?—the answer does not come as easily as with other incidents such as the Boat Stealing and Bird Nesting episodes. The answer—the one Wordsworth is able to come up with—is that these "spots of time" contain a power to "nourish and invisibly repair" the mind. Wordsworth would struggle with the important definition of spots of time. In 1799 the effect of the spots is very briefly sketched, and no explanation of why *those particular moments of childhood* would nourish and repair the mind is given. The 1805 *Prelude* strives to correct both these defects, but an essential ambiguity will remain in all versions of Wordsworth's great autobiography. It is the nature of screen memories to perplex, to make us question why *that* memory rather than another is foregrounded. Given the fact that he had no access to more modern theories of repression, the answer Wordsworth develops in 1805 is quite insightful. (And this of course does not even touch on, *can* not touch on, the fact that it is great poetry.)

The proximity of the Drowned Man and Gibbet episodes in 1799 offers a too-concentrated repetition of earlier traumatic imagery, and in revising these episodes Wordsworth is unconsciously driven to separate them, attempting to subordinate their Real imagery to different tasks in his narrative design. In addition to this strategy, Wordsworth changes the details of the screen memories in order to make them less oppressive. As well as removing some of the imagery which most obviously suggests his earlier traumatic poetry, Wordsworth adds that most reliable of safeguards against the threat of the Real, the Symbolic. In the Drowned Man episode of 1805, Wordsworth claims that having seen a dead body break the surface of Esthwaite Lake at the age of nine was not frightening because of his earlier exposure to such things in books. Similarly, in the revised Gibbet episode the ridge of turf from 1799 (evocative of a possible grave in *The Thorn*) is replaced by comforting words—the name of a murderer, which is, to the adult Wordsworth who writes, more comforting than the energy associated with the ridge of turf. Aside from a number of minor revisions, these protective strategies will be sufficient, and

childhood trauma as presented in 1805 will be a stable unit in Wordsworth's tripartite defense against the Real sublime.

Of all the autobiographical vignettes in *The Prelude,* the Gibbet episode is the earliest on the timeline, the only one taking place before Wordsworth's removal to Hawkshead. He was five at the time of the original experience, at "The twilight of rememberable life," as he puts it in the 1799 version. As we discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the factual details of the memory are reported differently in 1799 and 1805: in the first version there is a grave-shaped ridge of turf at the scene of the gibbeting, and in the revision this is transformed into the name of the murderer, carved into the ground. It is the nature of screen memories to take the form that repression demands at the time of recollection, and it is thus not so strange that Wordsworth's memory of the scene would differ at different times. But it should be noted that in most of Wordsworth's revisions to *The Prelude,* it is primarily the *interpretation* of the events—and not the events themselves—that change in the retelling. This might suggest that this particular screen memory is especially charged for Wordsworth, demanding a decisive response. As we shall see with the Drowned Man episode, Wordsworth will later claim that the Symbolic intervention of books at an early age prevented him from being disturbed by the appearance of a ghastly corpse. Here the Symbolic—the name of the murderer—becomes an actual part of the scene, as if a familiarity with the "forests of romance" is not enough to safeguard Wordsworth from this memory. Why does Wordsworth need to see the name of a murderer as having been carved into this valley bottom?

Obviously, the answer to this question *might* be, Because there actually *was* a murderer's name carved into the turf, and Wordsworth in the 1805 reading is remembering the incident accurately. Probably the strongest argument against this notion is simply that the murderer's name is not in the 1799 Gibbet episode, and there is no reason for it not to be, assuming it was a part of the original experience. Given Wordsworth's tendency to rely on the Symbolic when threatened by material associated with the Real sublime, I feel reasonably confident in saying, as Mary Jacobus says so eloquently, that "it is, after all, [Wordsworth's] own hand that has added the inscription, cleared away the grass, and converted the original site of repression into a sign of memory or immortality rather than forgetfulness or death—a sign that

is crucial to the unfolding argument of his own poem" (*Romanticism* 18).

The murderer's name is a defense against trauma, and the true traumatic element in both the 1799 and 1805 versions of this episode, there and yet not there, is the gibbet itself. This object, which has "mouldered down" (*1805*: XI: 290) in the years following its original appearance, exposed to the harsh elements of Wordsworth's repression, is nothing other than the gibbet from *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. The Drowned Man episode will suggest *Peter Bell*, and this provokes less of a crisis than the Gibbet episode, but this is perhaps because Peter Bell's sufferings are a pale reflection of the Sailor's in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. Despite the rewritings of trauma poetry, the Sailor remains Wordsworth's proxy, the one character in the canon exposed to the full onslaught (such as it is, in poetry) of the Real. Finally in *The Prelude* Wordsworth puts a gibbet in his own past, absent in "fact" but present in language. Even though he assures us all traces of the gibbet have moldered (and how, then, as a five year-old, would he have understood the significance of the scene?), he needs all the help he can get, and in the 1805 version of the scene writes the murderer's name into the memory as the only defense that has worked consistently in the past. It is no coincidence that in the "earliest" of Wordsworth's childhood memories we find imagery from the first of his important poems, the one in which the repetition compulsion found its way into his verse. And of course the earlier the memory, the less reliable it is, and we can well imagine the fluidity of this recollection at the twilight of rememberable life, reforming itself to fit the poet's unconscious specifications. Wordsworth *needs* words to have been at the valley bottom, and so, he tells himself, they were there.

The Gibbet episode can not be considered apart from the definition of spots of time, which is much expanded in the 1805 *Prelude*:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with a distinct preeminence retain
> A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
> By false opinion and contentious thought,
> Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
> In trivial occupations and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds

Are nourished and invisibly repaired –
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had the deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood – in our childhood even
Perhaps are most conspicuous. Life with me,
As far as memory can look back, is full
Of this beneficent influence. (XI. 257-78)

The language here is strikingly similar to that of *Tintern Abbey*: even though these moments are "perhaps" most common in childhood, the 1793 visit to the Wye valley, proof against the din of towns and cities, is perhaps such a spot of time. This is the great triumph of memory in *The Prelude*: what is traumatic in childhood becomes the egotistical sublime in recollection. The 1805 definition of spots of time is much more detailed than that of 1799. In 1799 the one important question not answered is, What is it about the Gibbet memory – or any memory – that makes it a spot of time? In 1805, Wordsworth is prepared to make the assertion that spots of time occur in "those passages of life in which / We have had deepest feeling that the mind / Is lord and master, and that outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will." Spots of time are those moments which make us aware of the mind's power. But in what way does the Gibbet episode provide the young Wordsworth with this power?

The substance of the 1805 Gibbet episode is much the same as it had been in 1799:

At a time
When scarcely (I was not then six years old)
My hand could hold a bridle, with proud hopes
I mounted, and we rode toward the hills:

We were a pair of horsemen—honest James
Was with me, my encourager and guide.
We had not travelled long ere some mischance
Disjoined me from my comrade, and, through fear
Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.
The gibbet-mast was mouldered down, the bones
And iron case were gone, but on the turf
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer's name.
The monumental writing was engraven
In times long past, and still from year to year
By superstition of the neighborhood
The grass is cleared away; and to this hour
The letters are all fresh and visible.
Faltering, and ignorant where I was, at length
I chanced to espy those characters inscribed
On the green sod: forthwith I left the spot,
And reascending the bare common, saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near,
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
An ordinary sight, but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon on the lonely eminence,
The woman, and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. (XI. 278-315)

Again, no murderer's name is inscribed in the turf in the earlier version: "Only a long green ridge of turf remained / Whose shape was like a grave." We have already discussed Wordsworth's motivation for

transforming the ridge of turf (suggesting the mound in *The Thorn* that may be the grave of Martha Ray's child) into the reassuring Symbolic form of the murderer's name. But what of the other features of the scene? Are the other elements of the memory—"honest James," the beacon, the girl with the pitcher on her head—part of an actual experience Wordsworth had at the age of five, or details added to the screen memory for an unconscious reason (or perhaps a conscoius one)?

The most common reading of the scene's imagery, as with the Stolen Boat episode, is a traditional psychoanalytic interpretation. Richard J. Onorato, for example, concisely summarizes the imagery's status as

> very common dream symbols: the naked pool in a landscape enclosed by hills as woman or the mother; the mountain with the beacon on the top as phallic man or the father. The girl who bore a pitcher on her head is also woman or the mother; the pitcher, as something which holds and pours fluid to drink, is the symbol of the breast, here, as often in dreams, displaced but emphasized by that displacement. (214)

Many readings are consonant with this one. "Honest James," the family servant, can be interpreted as a father figure: when separated from him, though frightened, the young Wordsworth can fantasize his own manhood. The valley bottom, the site of an execution, can represent the wished-for elimination of the father-rival. Both James A. W. Heffernan and Richard E. Matlak, in the context of a psychoanalytic reading, draw attention to the fact that, in 1799, the executed man is described as "A man, the murderer of his wife" (I. 309). This is significant because the execution that took place near Penrith in 1767 was of a man who had poisoned a local butcher, leading one to suspect that Wordsworth might be rearranging details according to the specifications of the family romance. Remembering that both versions of this passage were written many years after the fact, and considering that his mother died five years before his father, one possible reading is that Wordsworth unconsciously blames his father-rival for taking away the object of his desire. At the age of five, in the wake of the resolution

of the oedipal drama, the young Wordsworth wants to see himself as an adult, autonomous; and the "visionary dreariness" of the conclusion of the scene, presided over by the phallic Penrith Beacon, is a reminder to the child that he is still, after all, a child.

I see no real incompatibility between a more orthodox Freudian interpretation and the Lacanian one I advocate. In this case, the key to reconciling these readings is in the murderer's name, carved into the turf in the (and for the) 1805 *Prelude*. According to the information we have, there was at the site of Thomas Nicholson's execution (the likely original of Wordsworth's valley bottom, if there is one) not the name of the killer, but rather "TPM" – for "Thomas Parker Murdered." Certainly "TPM" is as much language, as Symbolic, as "Thomas Nicholson" (for Lacan's purposes a chemical formula is enough), but I believe it is particularly appropriate that in Wordsworth's recollection it was a name and only a name. David Collings' perceptive reading deserves to be quoted in full:

> Insofar as these letters at once pronounce judgment and constitute a proper name, they might be read as a version of the Lacanian name of the father, which grounds the law of the father, the symbolic order. Such a reading of the letters implicitly proposes a complex scenario that one might simplify as follows: once the child's masochistic fantasy of rivalry with the father both effaces the maternal body and culminates in the father's death, a new force, an unknown hand or impersonal law, intervenes to put an end to the child's destructive game and to punish him for his wish, as if the living father must be killed, at least in fantasy, before the dead father or the law of culture can assert itself in an authoritative fashion. (144-45)

Such an experience – the decisive assertion of the Name-of-the-Father – would certainly be traumatic, whether it took place at a valley bottom or elsewhere; but looked upon from the perspective of adulthood (Wordsworth wrote this addition to *The Prelude* in 1804), the memory of the experience can actually be reassuring for the poet, an anchor for the Symbolic existence which, if not happy, is at least not the trauma of an encounter with the Real sublime. The Name-of-the-Father

is preferable to whatever happened on Salisbury Plain, may even be seen as a safeguard against it.

However we read the substance of Wordsworth's encounter with the non-gibbet, how does this scene show the mind to be lord and master, the alleged virtue of spots of time? Wordsworth takes steps toward answering this question in the commentary immediately following the scene, lines composed in 1804:

> When, in blessed season,
> With those two dear ones—to my heart so dear—
> When, in the blessed time of early love,
> Long afterwards I roamed about
> In daily presence of this very scene,
> Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
> And on the melancholy beacon, fell
> The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam—
> And think ye not with radiance more divine
> From these remembrances, and from the power
> They left behind? So feeling comes in aid
> Of feeling, and diversity of strength
> Attends us, if but once we have been strong. (XI. 315-27)

Evidently in his experience as a five year-old, Wordsworth sees himself as having been strong. Though we might readily imagine coming away from such an encounter with this impression, the Gibbet episode does not make it clear how this was accomplished; apparently it has something to do with the "visionary dreariness" with which the scene is invested while the child looks for his guide. Wordsworth himself says that he has no language with which to describe this dreariness, so the ambiguity is not surprising. I believe that the power in question has to do with memory and the way Wordsworth's mind has evolved (which is of course the theme of *The Prelude* as a whole). It is only when Wordsworth returns to the scene with "those two dear ones"—Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Hutchinson, in 1787—that he becomes aware of the power left behind. More properly speaking, it is at some indeterminate point between 1775 and 1787 that this power is created, and it is in 1787 that its existence is first perceived. The most instructive comparison would be with *Tintern Abbey*: in returning to the Wye

valley, Wordsworth realizes that at *some point* between his first visit in 1793 and his return in 1798, his personality has undergone a radical change, from thoughtlessness to the egotistical sublime. Here the evolution is from childhood trauma to the ability to see the traumatic scene with "The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam." This feeling that "outward sense / Is but the obedient servant" of the mind seems to be related to the adult egotistical sublime, associated with the mind's ability to melt the features of an experience and reform it to the mind's specifications. Here, finally, the egotistical sublime is explicitly put to its actual purpose—to convert trauma and ultimately the Real into something else. Trauma can be made a part of Wordsworth's life story, but only as a memory, as something outgrown, to be replaced (eventually) by the egotistical sublime of adulthood. In the Drowned Man episode, which takes place only four years after the story of the Gibbet, we will get the distinct impression that trauma is already being left behind.

The changes Wordsworth makes to the Drowned Man episode for the 1805 *Prelude* are of tremendous significance for our purposes, and the things that do not change are just as important. Roughly speaking, the *events* of the episode remain the same, and it is the poet's *interpretation* of them that is revised. The 1805 version may be quoted in full:

> Well do I call to mind the very week
> When I was first entrusted to the care
> Of that sweet valley—when its paths, its shores
> And brooks, were like a dream of novelty
> To my half-infant thoughts—that very week,
> While I was roving up and down alone
> Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross
> One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,
> Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite's Lake.
> Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
> I saw distinctly on the opposite shore
> A heap of garments, left as I supposed
> By one who there was bathing. Long I watched,
> But no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
> Grew dark, with all the shadows on its breast,

And now and then a fish up-leaping snapped
The breathless stillness. The succeeding day—
Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale—
Went there a company, and in their boat
Sounded with grappling-irons and long poles:
At length, the dead man, 'mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face, a spectre shape—
Of terror even. And yet no vulgar fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before among the shining streams
Of fairyland, the forests of romance—
Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
With decoration and ideal grace,
A dignity, a smoothness, like the words
Of Grecian art and purest poesy. (V. 450-81)

The primary difference from the 1799 version is in the conclusion of the episode, in the lines that follow upon the dead man's rising "with his ghastly face." The 1799 conclusion is as follows:

I might advert
To numerous accidents in flood or field,
Quarry or moor, or 'mid the winter snows,
Distresses and disasters, tragic facts
Of rural history, that impressed my mind
With images to which in following years
Far other feelings were attached—with forms
That yet exist with independent life,
And, like their archetypes, know no decay. (I. 279-87)

As I noted in my previous chapter, these lines are remarkable for the fact that they do not disclose Wordsworth's emotions (as he recalls them) at the time of the original incident. We would likely assume (if not familiar with later versions of *The Prelude*, or skeptical of them) that a nine year-old's encounter with the "ghastly" surfacing of a dead body would be extremely traumatic, but Wordsworth does not give us his

childhood response. And yet he specifically tells us that the occasion is an example of an experience "to which in following years / Far other feelings were attached." (The notion of an original experience taking on a different meaning in later years is central to the definition of spots of time in 1805—though not in 1799—which provides more evidence that in the first version of *The Prelude* the Drowned Man and Gibbet episodes comprise in some sense one large unit.) But feelings other than *what*? From 1799's silence on the emotional response we move in 1805 to the statement that the original event was not particularly harrowing: "no vulgar fear, / Young as I was, a child not nine years old, Possessed me." And this lack of an emotional reaction on the young Wordsworth's part is due to the beneficent influence of the Symbolic: "for my inner eye had seen / Such sights before among the shining streams / Of fairyland, the forests of romance." A familiarity with books prevents a small child from being frightened by a dead body? It is of course up to the individual reader to determine whether such an account is plausible. I question whether an acquaintance with any literary text would protect a child from the terrors associated with confronting a corpse. Reading the two versions of this episode together, we must ask why, if the fairytales lend the spectacle "decoration and ideal grace," is this placid response unmentionable in 1799?

Unsurprisingly, I believe the Drowned Man episode provokes such questions because the passage in reality relates to Wordsworth's adult emotions rather than those of childhood. The screen memory of seeing a drowned man break the surface of Esthwaite Lake (which the biographical data assures us did actually happen) is not selected for *The Prelude* because of any particular emotion it stirred in Wordsworth at the age of nine, but because its imagery repressively repeats that of the trauma poem *Peter Bell*. In that work Peter Bell—a character representing Wordsworth himself—brings a drowned man to the surface of the Swale with his staff, just as in the Drowned Man episode "a company" "Sounded with grappling irons and long poles" to bring the body to light. Peter Bell removes the dead man from the river immediately after experiencing a devastating trance as a result of gazing at the indistinct form beneath the water. Peter Bell's trance is the result of an anxiety—ultimately Wordsworth's—that what is under the water is related in some way to the Real. The same anxiety finds its way into both versions of the Drowned Man episode. Even in the 1799

reading Wordsworth has clearly selected (and no doubt altered) a memory well suited to protect him from *Peter Bell*. There is no bewitching attempt on the young Wordsworth's part—as there was in the trauma poem—to divine what terrible thing might be lurking in the lake. The only reason he lingers is that he sees the man's garments, hardly in themselves a cause of trauma, on the opposite shore of the lake. If anything, the clothing is reassuring, in the sense that it indicates a specific object—and not the Real—is in the water, making Peter Bell's horrifying whirl of speculations unnecessary for the boy. Also, it is left to others and not Wordsworth to bring the dead man to the surface. In selecting this childhood memory for the Two-Part *Prelude*, Wordsworth writes a scene which repeats the imagery of *Peter Bell*—and this is a necessary repetition—in such a way that the Real is distanced more decisively than it had been in the trauma poem. And yet this is not enough. In 1799 Wordsworth says that the emotion experienced by the child is different than that attached to the episode "in following years"; and the details of neither emotional state are described. In reality it is the emotions of the *adult* Wordsworth—haunted as they are by the unconscious pressure of the Real sublime—that are unspeakable in the 1799 *Prelude*. The scene must be made more palatable to Wordsworth, and this is accomplished in the 1805 rewrite through the intervention of the Symbolic: as with Freud at the crisis point of the dream of Irma's injection, Wordsworth is desperate for an infusion of language, and fairytales and "the forests of romance" accomplish this. There is an assured, confident tone in 1805 that is absent in 1799. This has to do not only with the addition of the Symbolic to the memory, but also with the crucial decision to separate it from the related Gibbet episode. Wordsworth's strategy with the seventy most emotionally charged lines of the 1799 *Prelude* is to divide and conquer, and as we saw, with the Gibbet episode also the Symbolic was one of the keys to revision. In 1805, the primary difference to be seen between the Gibbet and Drowned Man epiosdes is the composure with which Wordsworth meets the corpse. In the Gibbet episode the barest suggestion of the scene of an execution—the actual gibbet and the bones it encased have moldered away—and yet Wordsworth is traumatized; in the Drowned Man passage a ghastly corpse holds no terrors for him. Taken together, these scenes would suggest that at some time between the ages of five and nine, Wordsworth has changed radically. In Wordsworth's mind

he is in the process of evolving into the kind of person who has the experiences of encounter poetry.

Admonished From Another World: The Discharged Soldier and Blind Beggar Episodes

The Discharged Soldier episode is extraordinarily long, covering nearly one hundred and fifty lines in the 1805 *Prelude*. (The length is considerably cut in later revisions.) We might see the episode as being in three distinct parts: (1) Wordsworth walking alone, with particular attention paid to his mood; (2) Wordsworth watching the soldier unobserved; and (3) Wordsworth interacting with the soldier and locating shelter for him. It will be obvious that a similar pattern is followed in *Resolution and Independence*, one exception being that the self-sufficient leech-gatherer does not need Wordsworth's help in finding lodging. The poet's mood at the start of the two pieces is somewhat different as well. *Resolution and Independence* starts off with the poet happy, happy to excess even, and it is this mood that leads to the depression with which the old man is met. In the Discharged Soldier episode, the poet's mood at the outset is unambiguously described as "Tranquil" (IV. 376), and it is the sudden appearance of the soldier that strikes the note of discord. Despite these distinctions, the similarities between *Resolution and Independence* and the Discharged Soldier episode are more prevalent than the differences, and are essential in defining both as encounter poetry. In both cases we have a poet who at some point is in an anxious mood, who meets an unusual figure, asks him questions, and at the end of the experience seems somewhat heartened. Wordsworth makes use of both the leech-gatherer and the discharged soldier to relieve anxiety associated with the trauma of the Real sublime. Jonathan Wordsworth (14) notes a Wordsworthian "compulsion to ask questions" of "borderers" such as these men, and indeed in these situations the most reliable way for Wordsworth to recover his equilibrium is through language. Faced with a threat to his normal Symbolic existence, *what* these men say to Wordsworth is less important than the fact that they provide him with words; Wordsworth is eager for any conversation that will allow him to reenter the chain of signification.

The episode begins with Wordsworth walking alone along a public road, late at night. The first emotions expressed are of a joy at the beauty of Nature. At a first glance Wordsworth's description of his "happy state" at the beginning of the Discharged Soldier episode seems very much like the "serene and blessed mood" of the egotistical sublime described in *Tintern Abbey*. The ostensible effect of the nocturnal scenery in the Discharged Soldier episode is as follows:

> O happy state! what beauteous pictures now
> Rose in harmonious imagery; they rose
> As from some distant region of my soul
> And came along like dreams—yet such as left
> Obscurely mingled with their passing forms
> A consciousness of animal delight,
> A self-possession felt in every pause
> And every gentle movement of my frame. (IV. 392-99)

These "beauteous pictures" are broadly similar to Wordsworth's description of the egotistical sublime in *Tintern Abbey*:

> that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on,
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame,
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things. (42-50)

In *Tintern Abbey* the substance of the egotistical sublime is a metaphysical *insight*: we *see into* the life of things, to see the essence beneath the existence, the spirit that "rolls through all things." This is a version of what happens in the Kantian sublime, an intuition of the supersensible. The beauteous pictures of the Discharged Soldier episode are seemingly not associated with a similar insight. In fact Wordsworth is not sure *where* they come from: "they rose / *As from* some distant region of my soul / And came along *like* dreams." (italics

mine) The ambiguity of these pictures helps to mark this episode as an instance of encounter poetry rather than of the egotistical sublime. The suggestion of dreams here is important, and is a feature shared with both *Resolution and Independence* and the Blind Beggar episode. Dreams are insubstantial like the egotistical sublime, but their connection to the waking world of external reality is obscure at best. The hallmark of the egotistical sublime is a confidence in the relationship between inner and outer, even if this confidence is immediately qualified by a statement that it all might be a vain belief. Encounter poetry is marked by uncertainty, and this uncertainty will take a physical form in the weird figure of the discharged soldier.

Wordsworth comes upon the soldier abruptly:

> While thus I wandered, step by step led on,
> It chanced a sudden turning of the road
> Presented to my view an uncouth shape,
> So near that, slipping back into the shade
> Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him well,
> Myself unseen. He was of stature tall,
> A foot above man's common measure tall,
> Stiff in his form, and upright, lank and lean—
> A man more meagre, as it seemed to me,
> Was never seen abroad by night or day.
> His arms were long, and bare his hands; his mouth
> Shewed ghastly in the moonlight; from behind,
> A milestone propped him, and his figure seemed
> Half sitting, and half standing. I could mark
> That he was clad in military garb,
> *Though faded yet entire. He was alone,*
> Had no attendant, neither dog, nor staff,
> Nor knapsack; in his very dress appeared
> A desolation, a simplicity
> That seemed akin to solitude. (IV. 400-19)

The similarities to the beginning of the encounter with the leech-gatherer are obvious. In both instances Wordsworth is at first not seen—though in *Resolution and Independence* there is no indication he is *trying* to avoid detection—leaving him free to observe the strange

spectacle at his leisure. Both men are found in an unusual posture. The discharged soldier is "Half sitting, and half standing" against the milestone, and when the leech-gatherer is first encountered, Wordsworth says,

> His body was bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in life's pilgrimage. (66-67)

Also, both men are described as being "propped" (a crucial verb in encounter poetry)—the soldier by the milestone, and the leech-gatherer by his staff. There is an important sense of enervation in Wordsworth's first glimpse of these characters: these men are not able to stand up, so it seems, under their own power. In this way they are made to stand in for Wordsworth's own suffering, bearing the unconscious pressures of the Real sublime. Read in this context, the sudden appearance of the discharged soldier does not interrupt the eighteen year-old Wordsworth's tranquil mood; in the reconstruction of the screen memory, he makes the mood possible, taking the pressure off the troubled poet who writes. Indeed these men suffer terribly on behalf of Wordsworth: the leech-gatherer seems to be the oldest man who ever lived, and the soldier seems the most meager, respectively aged and wasted away in Wordsworth's repressive gaze.

In the soldier's first appearance, there seems something almost inhuman or unearthly about him. Jonathan Wordsworth, drawing a connection with the other passage discussed in this section, tells us that "the Discharged Soldier is reduced to frightening inhumanity. Like the London beggar he is propped, has become in his fearful steadiness an object. The poet scans him in mingled fear and sorrow, but fear at this stage predominates" (13-14). Just as he treads an unusual line between person and object, he similarly in his immobility is somewhere between life and death; or as Geoffrey H. Hartman says, "in such border figures life and death, like natural and supernatural faith, are no longer separable" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 225). This quality is made explicit in *Resolution and Independence*, where the old man seems "not all alive nor dead." Here, the nearly supernatural trait is implicit in the soldier's "ghastly" (also meaning "ghostly") mouth, his motionlessness, and of course in the fact that his appearance causes a relatively sophisticated eighteen year-old to hide from him. Jonathan Wordsworth finds

literary analogues behind the description of the discharged soldier: in Milton's description of Death in Book II of *Paradise Lost* and in Wordsworth's own description of a ghost in *The Vale of Esthwaite* (13). It is worth noting, though, that this passage does *not* echo earlier trauma poetry, other than indirectly in that it echoes *Resolution and Independence*. One of the notable accomplishments of *The Prelude*'s tripartite developmental structure is that earlier trauma poetry is (or seems to be) less important as a background for moments of encounter, much of that energy having been transferred to the poetry of childhood trauma discussed in the previous section. Generally, I would suggest that figures of encounter suggest death (or Death) because of their initial motionlessness, which again is a repressive rewriting of the trances experienced by Peter Bell and the Sailor of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*.

As if the soldier's ghastly appearance and eerie motionlessness are not enough to unnerve Wordsworth, the stakes in the encounter are quickly raised:

> Long time
> Did I peruse him with a mingled sense
> Of fear and sorrow. From his lips meanwhile
> There issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain
> Or of uneasy thought; yet still his form
> Kept the same steadiness, and at his feet
> His shadow lay, and moved not. In a glen
> Hard by, a village stood, whose roofs and doors
> Were visible among the scattered trees,
> Scarce distant from the spot an arrow's flight.
> I wished to see him move, but he remained
> Fixed to his place, and still from time to time
> Sent forth a murmuring voice of dead complaint,
> Groans scarcely audible. (IV. 419-32)

We can imagine an eighteen year-old Wordsworth listening to the sounds of the old man, and trying to put a name to them. But they are more disturbing to the Wordsworth who composes the episode, because they are incoherent, not quite language—suggestive of a threat to the Symbolic. In *Resolution and Independence*, of course, there is

something *in* the leech-gatherer's speech which causes the poet for a frightening moment to lose his grip on language. Here, the problem starts before the young man can even engage the soldier in conversation.

But the cure for the problem will be the same: language. Confronted with the soldier's murmuring, suggestive "of pain / Or of uneasy thought" (in fact Wordsworth's own pain and thought, and in relation to the Real sublime), the frightened young man quickly reveals himself and asks for words:

> Without self-blame
> I had not thus prolonged my watch; and now,
> Subduing my heart's specious cowardise,
> I left the shady nook where I had stood
> And hailed him. Slowly from his resting-place
> He rose, and with a lean and wasted arm
> In measured gesture lifted to his head
> Returned my salutation, then resumed
> His station as before. And when erelong
> I asked his history, he in reply
> Was neither slow nor eager, but, unmoved,
> And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,
> A stately air of mild indifference,
> He told in simple words a soldier's tale:
> That in the tropic islands he had served,
> Whence he had landed scarcely ten days past—
> That on his landing he had been dismissed,
> And now was travelling to his native home.
> At this I turned and looked towards the village,
> But all were gone to rest, the fires all out,
> And every silent window to the moon
> Shone with a yellow glitter. 'No one there',
> Said I, 'is waking; we must measure back
> The way which we have come. Behind yon wood
> A labourer dwells, and, take it on my word,
> He will not murmur should we break his rest,
> And with a ready heart will give you food
> And lodging for the night.' At this he stooped,

> And from the ground took up an oaken staff
> By me yet unobserved, a traveller's staff—
> Which I suppose from his slack hand had dropped,
> And lain till now neglected in the grass. (IV. 432-63)

Wordsworth here would like to envision himself as naturally disposed to charity toward beggars, and momentarily checked by his "heart's specious cowardise" in the face of the soldier's unusual appearance. In reality, it is not a recovery from his shock that causes him to hail the man, but rather that the latter's murmuring has forced the moment to its crisis. As with the request in *Resolution and Independence* that the leech-gatherer repeat information that Wordsworth already knows, it will not matter *what* the soldier says, but only *that* he speaks.

The soldier tells Wordsworth his story, and the "stately air of mild indifference" with which he does so is in keeping with the eerie motionlessness that has unnerved the poet. (This is intensified by Wordsworth's remark, in a stunning choice of words, that in telling his tale the man is "unmoved." It is difficult for the soldier to be moved in either sense of the word.) But the words have served their purpose, and the soldier has been humanized enough that the young Wordsworth can step into the role of benefactor, and begin to work on finding a place for the man to stay. Wordsworth quickly thinks of a friend who will welcome the soldier (a "labourer" about whom we learn nothing else). Significantly, Wordsworth tells the soldier, "He will not murmur should we break his rest." The phrasing here is unusual, and not accidental. We see here the reworking of the screen memory to meet the emotional needs of the man who writes the poem: *this* Wordsworth, if not the eighteen year-old who ostensibly experiences the episode, has had enough murmuring for one encounter.

Similarly important in a poet who always chooses his words with great care is Wordsworth's comment that the soldier "from the ground took up an oaken staff / By me yet unobserved, a traveller's staff— / Which I suppose from his slack hand had dropped, / And lain *till now neglected in the grass.*" *This would not be remarkable, had* Wordsworth in his first impression of the soldier not noted, "He was alone, / Had no attendant, neither dog, nor staff, / Nor knapsack." If he had simply overlooked the staff at first, why would he have stated—as a matter of fact—that there *was* no staff? We can only assume this

contradiction is intentional. David B. Pirie gives a perceptive reading of the effect this has on the reader:

> [Wordsworth] says at line 416 that the Soldier has no stick, and only after another fifty lines does he reveal that there in fact was 'a Traveller's staff' which had at first been 'unobserv'd'. He can only 'suppose' that earlier it had dropped out of the Soldier's 'slack hand / And lain till now neglected in the grass' (461-3). Thus the reader is made to stumble through the original experience at the floundering poet's side, at first ignorantly keeping this mysterious apparition at a safe distance and only later discovering the mundane details which might encourage a more sympathetic approach. (188)

The lack of mundane details in the first description of the soldier *does* heighten the eerieness of his appearance, but it seems to me that this would be accomplished just as easily by a failure to mention the staff as by directly stating that there was no such object present. In either case, it seems to me, the reader would be floundering at the poet's side as he first examines the soldier.

I believe the key to understanding this contradiction lies in Wordsworth's earlier poetry. In chapter four we examined the ways in which *Resolution and Independence* repeats the traumatic imagery of *Peter Bell* and *The Thorn*. As we noted in the present chapter, most of this imagery in *The Prelude* is removed from moments of encounter and placed in the descriptions of childhood trauma. But of course the leech-gatherer, and behind him Peter Bell, has a staff. In the trauma poem the staff is very charged with meaning, as it is with this object that Peter Bell brings the dead man to the surface of the Swale upon recovering from his trance. Examining this common object in the context of the Discharged Soldier episode shows us the pressures something so seemingly neutral can exert on Wordsworth. First he says that the soldier had no staff—not that it was not immediately noticed, but that there *was no staff*—and then says that in fact he did. What happens between these contradictory statements? The threat to the Symbolic, the soldier's incoherent "murmuring sounds, as if of pain / Or of uneasy thought," which force the young Wordsworth out of his hiding

place to engage the man in conversation. It is after the two have spoken that Wordsworth is able to recognize—to acknowledge—the presence of the staff. The earlier statement that there was no staff is not a lack of observation but rather a denial of what is at first unmentionable. When the pain associated with the Real sublime has been averted through the Symbolic, Wordsworth is able to admit the existence of the staff. Pirie is right in saying that Wordsworth is able to notice the staff when the soldier has been humanized for Wordsworth; but he is humanized in the sense that Wordsworth realizes him to be a person like himself, not some bizarre embodiment of the Real—like a dead body swinging in a gibbet, for example. *The Prelude* is structured such that traumatic imagery is placed in stories of childhood, and even something as nondescript as a staff can not be admitted to a scene of adulthood until Wordsworth reassures himself that the man who owns it is not some version of Peter Bell.

The Blind Beggar episode is much shorter than that of the Discharged Soldier. It is situated in Book VII of *The Prelude*, relating to "Residence in London." Most likely this episode takes place sometime between January and May 1791, when Wordsworth was twenty, not quite two years after the Discharged Soldier episode. Here we have a poet on the cusp of adulthood—he has just received his degree—perhaps not yet prepared for the egotistical sublime, but having reached a point of development where moments of encounter are far less menacing. Though the episode as a whole is unnerving for the poet, we shall see that the meeting with the London beggar, the figure of encounter, is actually reassuring, in fact the means by which Wordsworth recovers his equilibrium.

Criticism has tended to find a kind of metaphysical terror in the Blind Beggar episode, and especially in the figure of the beggar himself. Mary Jacobus says that "the blind, propped beggar is the most threatening of all Wordsworth's Dark Interpreters." (*Romanticism* 113) Jonathan Wordsworth's eloquent comment, which makes an explicit comparison to *Resolution and Independence*, finds a similar darkness in this tale of the blind beggar:

> The episode as a whole can be seen as reflecting once again the achievement of imagination, but the truth to

> which it penetrates is a truth about littleness....Where the Leech Gatherer had, so it seemed, given '*human strength,* and strong admonishment', the beggar leaves him gazing 'As if admonished from another world'—a distant world in whose view humanity dwindles very uncomfortably. Of all the borderers this beggar shows most clearly the terror that underlies Wordsworthian optimism, the fear of the child bewildered by his mother's death, desertion, fear that the years must truly bear *us*—not just others, the sordid men and their transient occupations, but man in all his grandeur, and the poet too—'forward to distress and guilt, / Pain and abasement'. (304)

This is a grim picture. In this reading the Blind Beggar episode makes Wordsworth afraid that he is like the "others, the sordid men and their transient occupations," similarly doomed to a future of misery. A particularly sordid man in the Wordsworth canon would be Peter Bell, and we have at length explored Wordsworth's fear that he is more Peter Bell than the "favored being" singled out by a benevolent Nature for an important destiny. Inasmuch as such anxieties are ultimately based on the terrors of the Real sublime, I would certainly agree with Jonathan Wordsworth that much of this energy is at work in the Blind Beggar episode. I would note, though, that—unlike in *Resolution and Independence* and the Discharged Solider episode—Wordsworth does not report an emotionally troubling reaction to the meeting with the figure of encounter. He says that "My mind did at this spectacle turn round / As with the might of waters"; certainly this suggests a powerful reaction *of some kind,* but the poet neglects to give us its substance, or to indicate how it might represent a threat. Similarly the notion that he is "admonished from another world" sounds ominous, but we do not find out what this admonishment means to Wordsworth.

But if we want intense and painful emotions from Wordsworth, we need look no further than the *earlier* portion of the Blind Beggar episode. Prior to confronting the beggar, Wordsworth reports being "oppressed" with moods that cause the ordinary stuff of the everyday—"all the ballast of familiar life"—to fade away bewilderingly. It is in such a mood, "lost / Amid the moving pageant,"

that Wordsworth comes upon the beggar. Unlike the Discharged Soldier episode, the crisis in this passage occurs *before* meeting the encounter figure. As we shall see, meeting the figure of the beggar is actually a relief to Wordsworth, and this seems to be partly due to the text on his chest—a Symbolic anchor which allows Wordsworth to reestablish his ordinary relationship to the external world. This goes hand in hand with—is essentially the same as—a recovery from the trauma of the Real sublime implied in the "mystery" that assaults Wordsworth's psyche.

One reason, I believe, that critics have tended to see this episode in such a negative light can be found in the fact that Wordsworth—unlike in *Resolution and Independence* and the Discharged Soldier episode—does not engage the encounter figure in conversation, and does not specifically report coming away from the experience in a good mood. At the end of the Discharged Soldier episode, Wordsworth says that he went home "with quiet heart," and seems to suggest at the end of the poem about the leech-gatherer that the experience has cheered him, that he will now himself be more resolute and independent. But in the Blind Beggar episode, Wordsworth does not linger on the event long enough to explain its impact, leaving criticism to fill in the blanks. Generally speaking, there is a truncated quality to this episode that leaves one somewhat bewildered. We think of the other encounter poetry, of the way Wordsworth willingly—if not immediately, in the case of the discharged soldier—engages the encounter figure in conversation. Indeed, neither the soldier nor the leech-gatherer notices Wordsworth, and the fact that there even *is* an encounter is a matter of his choosing. In the Blind Beggar episode, we might question whether there is an "encounter" at all. Of course the blind man does not see Wordsworth, and if it is some sort of "specious cowardise" that prevents him from identifying himself, he evidently does nothing to "subdue" it. Rather than a long and profitable conversation, the "exchange" is limited to Wordsworth's quick scanning of the message on the man's chest. In *Resolution and Independence* and the Discharged Soldier episode Wordsworth is chatty (the conversation with the leech-gatherer starts with small talk about the weather), but here whatever he gains from the paper the man wears is apparently enough. The Blind Beggar episode is very brief, and in it Wordsworth is uncommonly reticent about interpreting events for the reader.

The Blind Beggar episode may be quoted in full:

But foolishness, and madness in parade,
Though most at home in this their dear domain,
Are scattered everywhere, no rarities,
Even to the rudest novice of the schools.
O friend, one feeling was there which belonged
To this great city by exclusive right.
How often in the overflowing streets
Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, 'The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery.'
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed
By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams,
And all the ballast of familiar life—
The present, and the past, hope, fear, all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man—
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.
And once, far travelled in such mood, beyond
The reach of common indications, lost
Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
Abruptly to be smitten with the view
Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
The story of the man, and who he was.
My mind did at this spectacle turn round
As with the might of waters, and it seemed
To me that in this label was a type
Or emblem of the utmost that we know
Both of ourselves and of the universe,
And on the shape of this unmoving man,
His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked,
As if admonished from another world. (VII. 589-623)

An important claim in this episode, not commonly discussed in the criticism, is that these moods that have assaulted Wordsworth on a number of occasions (he notes "How often" this has occurred) are *London* moods: "one feeling was there which belonged / To this great city by exclusive right." Though it is plausible that such moods would be occasioned by the sensory overload Wordsworth associates with London, it is interesting that he would specifically state such problems as belonging to London—not to "cities," but *only to London*. The relationship between city and country in Wordsworth's poetry is obviously an important one, and parallel to his relationship with Coleridge, as is played out movingly in the latter's great *Frost at Midnight*. (Note the "O friend" of line 593. Explicit references to *The Prelude*'s addressee are, in my opinion, never accidental.) Wordsworth was raised amidst rural scenes, and the episodes of *The Prelude* dealing with childhood show his gratitude for this, his feeling that he was "Much favored in my birthplace, and no less / In that beloved vale to which erelong / I was transplanted" (I. 307-09) The location of his formative childhood experiences seemingly went hand in hand with the ministry Nature had planned for him as a "favored being." And certainly the specific childhood experiences we discussed could not have occurred in the big city. But why would the mood of the Blind Beggar episode belong only to London?

I believe that Wordsworth is here using space in much the same defensive way he uses time in *The Prelude* in general. The structure is such that Wordsworth is able to see trauma—grounded ultimately in the Real sublime of 1793—as being exclusively an experience of childhood, formative and escaped. Moments of encounter like this episode—the intermediate stage on the way to the egotistical sublime—belong to a period on the verge of adulthood, ranging it seems (given the episodes discussed in *The Prelude*) from about the age of eighteen to twenty. Composing passages like that pertaining to the blind beggar in his thirties, Wordsworth has hopefully put such unnerving encounters behind him as well. And yet there is *Resolution and Independence* to consider: in composing the story of the leech-gatherer, Wordsworth had at the age of thirty-two described it as happening more or less in the present. Is there a residual anxiety here that there may be other leech-gatherers in Wordsworth's future? If he can keep such nightmare moods restricted to particular areas like London, perhaps this is a way

of making the rest of England safe for him. And of course we might again think of the notion of psychic evolution, of the sense that the poet's mind is *growing* toward an experience of the egotistical sublime. At the age of eighteen, at the time of the Discharged Soldier episode, moments of encounter could happen anywhere, even in the beloved Lake District; by the age of twenty such moments can only occur in such an unnerving place as London. Soon these moments—and the bad moods that go along with them—will not occur at all, or so Wordsworth would like to believe.

But what is the substance of the poet's mood in the Blind Beggar episode? It seems to issue from a sense of inscrutability: "How often in the overflowing streets / Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said / Unto myself, 'The face of every one / That passes by me is a mystery.'" Confronted by a mass of people, Wordsworth is unable to see within any of them. But is this, would this be, an unusual phenomenon? Is Wordsworth under normal circumstances, away from the city for example, able to see the truth behind the facial expressions of others? Frances Ferguson says that Wordsworth's statement

> denudes the world of visible forms of any possibility of internality, as if it were unimaginable that these faces could be human beings who might take themselves seriously. The poet as an alien thus reduces appearances to their lowest limit by rendering them as externality without any connection with internal existence. The visible becomes, effectively, invisible, because it loses all the force of being thought of as an index to an invisible world of significance. (140-41)

This is an acute analysis, but in my opinion shares the poet's impulse to see the ordinary as the extraordinary: what Wordsworth is in effect saying is that he has lost his *normal ability* to *see through people*. This strange relationship between inner and outer makes one think of *Tintern Abbey*: the effect of the egotistical sublime is that we see beyond surfaces, that we "see into the life of things." Of course my argument, with respect to *The Prelude* as a whole, is that Wordsworth sees himself at the time of this episode as having not yet acquired an access to the egotistical sublime; and yet it seems that the crisis here, as the poet

describes it, is that in London at the age of twenty he would often lose the ability to see beyond the surfaces of people to their essences. As with the episodes of childhood trauma, we can see the pressures of the moment of composition on the features of the screen memory. Years after *Tintern Abbey*, the fear that it is all a vain belief remains, and this anxiety is transposed onto the memory of London. Wordsworth would like to contain this anxiety within the great metropolis; the various tensions to be seen in *The Prelude* show how difficult this really is.

Immediately after asserting the opacity of the faces that pass by, external reality does fade away, but not to be replaced by the insights of *Tintern Abbey*:

> the shapes before my eyes became
> A second-sight procession, such as glides
> Over still mountains, or appears in dreams,
> And all the ballast of familiar life—
> The present, and the past, hope, fear, all stays,
> All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man—
> Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.

This is clearly a fadeout, but not a positive experience of the egotistical sublime. Rather than learning about the true nature of things, Wordsworth loses his hold even on their external features. This painful eclipse seems suggestive of a version of the traditional natural sublime, but it is no doubt significant that Wordsworth reports losing his hold on "All laws of acting, thinking, *speaking* man" (italics mine). The loss here is not of physical reality but of one's hold on normal modes of behavior and especially language. This is the threat of the trauma of the Real sublime. In *Resolution and Independence* this threat was embodied by Wordsworth's sudden inability to follow the leech-gatherer's speech ("nor word from word could I divide"); in the Discharged Soldier episode, by the soldier's incoherent, non-linguistic murmuring. Here too, there is a failure of language, and once again it will be *through* language that the poet is pulled back from the abyss.

It is in this sort of mood, Wordsworth says, that he met the actual beggar. The most conventional reading is to see this man as a kind of double for the poet, and especially in his function as autobiographer: the text on the man's chest, which tells "The story of

the man, and who he was," is seen as a kind of spare *Prelude*. But what is to be made—possible Miltonic overtones aside—of the fact that the beggar is blind, and thus unable to read his own story? Considering this radical disjunction between "poetic vision" and text, it is not surprising that critics have seen in the beggar a grim comment on the possibilities of autobiography, a "dark parody of the genre," in Susan J. Wolfson's phrase (142). Mary Jacobus (*Romanticism*), J. Douglas Kneale (*Monumental Writing*), and Paul Jay see the beggar as a kind of marker for the difficulties of Wordsworth's project in *The Prelude*. Jay's comment may perhaps be taken as representative:

> This is one of the strongest and most dramatic self-referential moments in *The Prelude*: 'smitten' by an image of himself as the blind Beggar, Wordsworth inscribes his sense of the limits of his autobiographical project in the 'emblem' which is the Beggar's note. The blind man's 'Prelude'—'a written paper, to explain/The story of the Man'—admonishes the poet because it signifies 'the utmost that we know/Both of ourselves and of the universe,' and thus reminds him (as he writes) of the difficulties he has undertaken in composing his own story. While the Beggar's literal blindness links him unmistakably, though of course paradoxically, with the visionary poet, it also reminds Wordsworth of the limited nature of his own self-referential project. (90-91)

This is a plausible interpretation of the beggar's function vis a vis *The Prelude* as a whole, but as with Jonathan Wordsworth's comment about the episode in general, it seems that there is a supposed emotional reaction on Wordsworth's part that the poet himself does not voice. Beyond the statement Wordsworth is making about the limitations of his literary project, I believe it is possible to read the discovery of the beggar in a much more positive light, and as a moment of recovery from the immediately preceding sense of being "lost / Amid the moving pageant." The key to this interpretation lies in the text on the blind man's chest. We have of course been encouraged by our reading of a number of other Wordsworthian texts to suspect that in a discovery of language the poet would find comfort rather than despair. Neil Hertz and Michael H. Friedman read the sighting of the

beggar (correctly, I believe) as an instance of Wordsworth recovering his equilibrium. Friedman, drawing a connection with *Resolution and Independence,* sees the beggar as rescuing Wordsworth from what the poet himself called "the abyss of idealism": "As with the leech gatherer, Wordsworth's being is again saved from devastation by the fact that such a being as the beggar, however maimed and ravaged, truly *is*" (54). Such a reading is broadly accurate, but does not take into account the linguistic overtones of the episode, and the crucial importance of the note on the man's chest. Hertz considers this text important for Wordsworth's recovery, and this is in the context of the autobiographical project:

> The encounter with the Beggar triangulates the poet's self in relation to his double, who is represented, for a moment, as an emblem of minimal difference fixed in relation to itself. The power of the emblem is that it reestablishes boundaries between representor and represented and, while minimizing the difference between them, keeps the poet-impresario from tumbling into his text. (60)

This is an intriguing observation, but the actual danger here is of the Real sublime, not of losing a necessary distinction between art and artist. Words are what the poet needs, and the situation is desperate enough that the implications this might have for autobiography are secondary. As at the crisis points of the other encounter poems, an absence or failure of language is the cause for anxiety, and a scant life story on a blind man's chest serves the same function as the chemical formula in the Freudian dream. The label may in fact be "the utmost that we know / Both of ourselves and of the universe," but with respect to the unconscious anxiety that occasions the screen memory's rehearsal in *The Prelude,* this is precisely enough.

There are significant differences between the Blind Beggar episode and the other examples of encounter poetry. Most notably there is the fact that Wordsworth does not engage the blind beggar in conversation, a crucial aspect of both *Resolution and Independence* and the Discharged Soldier episode. Seemingly he gets what he needs from the blind man and then moves on. As with New Historicist readings of

other parts of the canon (which we discussed at some length in the introduction as well as chapter two), such an undeniable lack of engagement with a political prospect leaves Wordsworth open to attack. Geraldine Friedman gives eloquent voice to this sentiment, noting

> the passage's striking silence on the urban poverty that presumably forces people to beg in the first place: in focusing on the man's appearance rather than his activity, Wordsworth has aestheticized a social problem into an occasion for a sublime experience. (137)

Given that Wordsworth tends to see encounter figures repressively in terms of economics (this is ultimately grounded in the young Wordsworth's uncertainty about how he would provide for his French family, discussed in some detail in the previous chapter), it *is* interesting that he does not trouble himself about this man's well-being. In *Resolution and Independence* the conversation the poet has with the leech-gatherer is centered around how the latter, despite his poverty, is able to provide for himself. In the Discharged Soldier episode the young Wordsworth busies himself about finding a place for the unfortunate soldier to stay. So even though Wordsworth may have ulterior motives for his altruism, we do have instances of the poet taking an ostensible interest in the lot of the less fortunate. More than anything, the Blind Beggar episode shows Wordsworth in a hurry to put the encounter behind him and move on to something else, and it is his own psychic self-preservation rather than hardheartedness which causes him to briskly pass over the man's sufferings. Conversations with the leech-gatherer and discharged soldier had been the key to Symbolic recovery, but had in each case brought with them the threat of a reawakening of the trauma of the Real sublime. Here, the paper on the man's chest provides a shortcut to the reassuring Symbolic resolution, without the necessity of a drawn-out conversation with an interlocutor who may say something Wordsworth does not like. Wordsworth is here disposed to take what he can get, quickly and without commentary acknowledge that he is "admonished," and end the episode. The hurried quality of the Blind Beggar encounter betrays an anxiety about the stability of the tripartite developmental structure

of *The Prelude*; Wordsworth would like to suggest that he is on the verge of leaving these encounters behind for the egotistical sublime, but himself seems unsure.

With Infinitude—And Only There: The Simplon Pass Episode

> Upturning with a band
> Of travellers, from the Valais we had clomb
> Along the road that leads to Italy;
> A length of hours, making of these our guides,
> Did we advance, and having reached an inn
> Among the mountains, we together ate
> Our noon's repast, from which the travellers rose
> Leaving us at the board. Erelong we followed,
> Descending by the beaten road that led
> Right to a rivulet's edge, and there broke off;
> The only track now visible was one
> Upon the further side, right opposite,
> And up a lofty mountain. This we took,
> After a little scruple and short pause,
> And climbed with eagerness—though not, at length,
> Without surprize and some anxiety
> On finding that we did not overtake
> Our comrades gone before. By fortunate chance,
> While every moment now encreased our doubts,
> A peasant met us, and from him we learned
> That to the place which had perplexed us first
> We must descend, and there should find the road
> Which in the stony channel of the stream
> Lay a few steps, and then along its banks—
> And further, that thenceforward all our course
> Was downwards with the current of the stream.
> Hard of belief, we questioned him again,
> And all the answers which the man returned
> To our inquiries, in their sense and substance
> Translated by the feelings which we had,

Ended in this – that we had crossed the Alps.

Imagination!--lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my song
Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
Halted without a struggle to break through,
And now, recovering, to my soul I say
'I recognise thy glory'. In such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
Is with infinitude – and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward –
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile. (VI. 494-548)

And so we return at last to the Simplon Pass, hopefully on the verge of insights that were unavailable during our first visit. The virtue of the egotistical sublime, of Wordsworthian memory in general we might say, is to give a new meaning to an old experience; Wordsworth expressed this notion poetically as early as 1798 in *Tintern Abbey*. The *meaning* of the Simplon Pass is something that comes upon Wordsworth later, a psychic residue of experience in which the confusion of the original moment evaporates. This of course is consistent with the tripartite theory of mental growth established in *The Prelude*: different types of insights and responses belong to different

phases in our psychic evolution. What phase is Wordsworth in the midst of in the summer of 1790?

It is interesting to note that in the lines pertaining to the original experience of Simplon in 1790, very little attention is paid to Wordsworth's emotions. Lines 494-524 are the description of a chain of events, and the attendant emotions are mentioned only in passing: surprise and anxiety that they have not overtaken their guides, doubt that they are following the correct path, disbelief when the peasant tells them they have taken a wrong turn after all. And we might also add that these are not Wordsworth's emotions only, but also those of Robert Jones: "Translated by the feelings which *we* had" (italics mine) etc. In a very cursory manner, Wordsworth seems to suggest that these are emotions that *anyone* might have had given the circumstances. As Wordsworth is recounting the 1804 encounter with Imagination that occurs as he recalls Simplon, Wordsworth's feelings are described at great length, and there is no mistaking the fact that these are his emotions and his alone. Why is so little attention given to Wordsworth's emotions in 1790, and so much to those belonging to 1804?

Given *The Prelude*'s tripartite structure as I have tried to outline it in this chapter, it is tempting to simply put Simplon on the timeline, and note that it occurs *between* the two encounter episodes of the Discharged Soldier and the Blind Beggar. In 1790 Wordsworth would presumably still be in the transitional phase between childhood (when we are vulnerable to trauma) and adulthood (when we have access to the egotistical sublime), the phase when encounters with mysterious figures occur. We could easily imagine the raw material of the Simplon Pass episode serving as the basis for an encounter poem: not yet realizing that they have already reached the apex of their journey, Wordsworth and Jones see an indistinct figure—the peasant—on the path ahead. At first, for some reason (perhaps he is initially motionless, propped in an unusual position), he has a disturbing, otherworldly quality, and the two college students are afraid to approach. Eventually, though, they subdue their hearts' specious cowardice, engage the man in conversation, and gain information which—though disappointing—is found to be in some obscure sense heartening. The fact that Wordsworth and Jones are not native speakers of the man's language would dovetail nicely with the interpretive issues that are

often associated with the encounter figure (the leech-gatherer is asked to repeat himself, the soldier is at first found to be incoherently mumbling). That Wordsworth does not give us such an encounter in the Simplon Pass episode reflects the fact that this passage is not about the past but rather about the relationship between the past and present; or in other words, about the egotistical sublime. In the telling of the story of Simplon, the peasant does not need to serve as an encounter figure, but simply to deliver bad news.

But why is the peasant's information even necessary? Or, to make explicit a question often ignored in the criticism, *how* did Wordsworth and Jones reach the apex of their journey without noticing it? Thomas Weiskel touches on this question, surmising that "evidently it was a cloudy, rainy day, and the heights were obscured" (195-96). This follows Dorothy Wordsworth's presumably reliable second-hand account, from the Wordsworth family's return trip to the Alps in 1820: in considering the gloominess of the precipices of Gondo she exclaims "what must they have been in the time of rain and vapour when my brother was here before" (*Journals* 2: 259). She does not specifically mention the weather as being what prevented the viewing of Simplon, but, as other commentators have noted, Wordsworth's mistake is difficult to make assuming normal visibility. So in fact weather probably *was* the culprit.

But this serves to cover the truly interesting question: why do we *need* Dorothy's testimony? If the elements were in fact to blame for Wordsworth's and Jones's mistake, why does Book VI of *The Prelude* remain silent on this? Is it not counter-intuitive that Wordsworth would tell us about not noticing a goal to which he had fervently aspired, and *not* tell us how this oversight happened? All in all there is something wholly *exemplary* about the Simplon Pass episode: the recollection of the experience in the Alps is seen as triggering an intuition in which the phenomenal world fades away to reveal the Imagination, and the specific means by which this is accomplished likewise evaporates in the intuition. The Simplon Pass episode is seen as an example of an experience which failed to happen, and the reason it failed to happen is seemingly unimportant to Wordsworth as he considers the contours of his Imagination.

Here we might profit by looking back at some of the issues we discussed, with respect to the Simplon Pass episode, in the

introduction. I began by noting that in many respects the egotistical sublime as expressed in this episode seemed to be the opposite of the traditional Kantian/Burkeian model. In the eighteenth century natural sublime to which Wordsworth was heir, the subject was overwhelmed by the immensity or dynamic power of a natural object; at Simplon what might have been an overpowering natural encounter never happens. And in Kant and Burke, the assault of the sublime is something the subject recovers from almost instantaneously; for Wordsworth fourteen years must elapse before he discovers Imagination in the recollection of the scene. The Simplon Pass episode is the story of an event that never happened, and never happened a long time ago.

I have suggested throughout that Wordsworth wants to construct an egotistical sublime in which the traumatic Real sublime of Salisbury Plain in 1793 is as distant as possible. In *Tintern Abbey* we saw that memory is very important in accomplishing this: the screen memory of the Wye valley in 1793 prevents a direct confrontation with the trauma experienced on Salisbury Plain immediately prior to the formation of this memory. In the construction of the 1805 *Prelude* we would say that the memory of Simplon performs a similar protective function. But as we saw in chapter two, the use of the Wye valley memory brought with it problems. The version of the developmental model of the egotistical sublime which was posited in *Tintern Abbey* forced Wordsworth to describe himself at the time of his first Wye visit—at the age of twenty-three—in unrealistic, childlike terms. The icon for the implausibility of this theory is the poet's sister Dorothy, who, as a twenty-six year-old accompanying her brother on his second visit to the Wye, is described as though she were a small, naive child. The pressures of the Real encounter on Sarum in 1793 force Wordsworth to see himself—and, by extension, Dorothy at a similar age—as having a primal, thoughtless connection to Nature at that time.

Such problems also threaten to come to the surface in Book VI of *The Prelude*. About a hundred lines before the beginning of the Simplon Pass episode proper, Wordsworth describes the self that explored the Alps in 1790 in language very reminiscent of *Tintern Abbey*'s description of the 1793 Wordsworth:

> But Nature then was sovereign in my heart,

And mighty forms seizing a youthful fancy
Had given a charter to irregular hopes. (VI. 346-48)

This is an obvious echo of

For nature then...
To me was all in all. (*Tintern Abbey* 72, 75)

But whereas in the poem from 1798 the pressures of the Real sublime force him into further efforts to describe his youthful self—like a roe, like a man flying from something he dreads, having no need of a remoter charm, by thought supplied—Wordsworth in Book VI of *The Prelude* is able to move quickly from the comment about Nature's sovereignty to a remark that he and Jones were caught up in the general excitement of the one-year anniversary of the French Revolution. Wordsworth seems to feel less pressure here than in *Tintern Abbey* to describe his younger self, and this is because the actual events of the trip to the Alps bear no direct relationship to the true story of Book VI, that of the Imagination.

In *Tintern Abbey* already the egotistical sublime is connected to an ability to penetrate the surface of phenomena: "We see into the life of things." Wordsworth specifically says that this power reveals itself at many different times and places; and yet, paradoxically, it seems that this power finds its source in a single location, the Wye valley: "in *this* moment there is life and food / For future years" (italics mine). Wordsworth is never completely convincing in his explanation for why in particular the Wye valley (as opposed to the countless other beautiful scenes we know he experienced) would have this virtue. As I argued in chapter two, the reason for this difficulty is simply that the "serene and blessed mood" of the egotistical sublime is *not* directly related to the Wye valley, but rather to the unspeakable Real trauma of Salisbury Plain. Wordsworth avoids this difficulty in *The Prelude* Book VI by connecting the sudden encounter with the Imagination to a non-event, an *event that never happened*, the blunder at Simplon. While Wordsworth had been at pains to explain what was so special about the Wye, here he quickly acknowledges that there was nothing special about the experience of 1790, that he and Jones were let down by what Simplon failed to signify. In the description of the encounter with

Imagination Wordsworth is particularly aggressive in arguing that the intuition of the supersensible has no true connection to Simplon or any other phenomenon:

> In such strength
> Of usurpation, in such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
> There harbours *whether we be young or old.*
> Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
> Is with infinitude—*and only there;*
> With hope it is, hope *that can never die,*
> Effort, and expectation, and desire,
> And something *evermore about to be.* (VI. 532-42, italics mine)

In this view, experiences of the egotistical sublime take place somewhere beyond the world of process; are not connected to our reality as such; as Nietzsche might phrase it (438), there is *no* time or place on earth for such things. When we have reached a particular level of development, we can have access to such moments at any time, even when writing about a somewhat disappointing experience in the Alps.

The egotistical sublime is ultimately a defense against the trauma associated with the Real sublime, and at the time of the 1805 *Prelude*'s composition Wordsworth wants to see the encounter with Imagination as something we can call on at will. As Thomas Weiskel concisely puts it: "Apocalypse becomes immanent; the sublime, a daily habit" (50). It is a tribute to the success of *The Prelude*'s tripartite developmental structure that the lines on Imagination are so confident, that Wordsworth expresses them with such a sense of inevitability. Though critics might question whether these assertions—as Wordsworth says of those in *Tintern Abbey*—are a vain belief, the poet himself shows no such anxiety, and this remains true throughout all later revisions of his great autobiography.

Conclusion: Judging Wordsworth

Scene 1, 1793: A young man in the midst of perhaps the worst year of his life—war between England and France has separated him from his lover, and he has never seen their infant daughter—is on his way to Wales to visit a college friend. Somewhere on Salisbury Plain, he has a devastating encounter with the traumatic Real.

Given the nature of Scene 1, what are the options for Scene 2? There is the possibility of becoming a sublime figure, of embracing—even *choosing*—a radical disjunction between Symbolic and Real selves. This is Scene 2 for Antigone, and also for the Sailor in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. But it is only in very rare circumstances—seemingly one must be either a ghost or condemned to death, Symbolically annihilated—that this option becomes an issue. Generally speaking, the best sublime figures are literary characters, carefully designed personalities responding to specific and extremely unusual circumstances: it is in their *difference* from the rest of us that they provide catharsis (or whatever we call the intended effect). So this kind of sublimity cannot be the typical response. Another version of Scene 2 would simply be psychosis. In this instance the trauma of the Real could not be confined in the unconscious, and the resulting foreclosure would lead to a complete breakdown of reality, with attendant hallucinations. Less literary, but again this would be an unusual reaction.

The typical response to Scene 1 would be repression. The traumatic Real moment is forced down into the unconscious, and Scene 2 becomes an instance of the subject recovering equilibrium. This is not the end of the story—the repressed material will periodically return disguised as one symptom or another—but life and sanity are preserved. As I have tried to argue, this is Wordsworth's response to

his Real moment on Salisbury Plain. The first symptoms of Wordsworth's encounter are the Salisbury Plain poems, in which a fictionalized version of the poet is made to suffer on his behalf. This trauma comes to be expressed in Wordsworth's later poetry through the medium of screen memories. Eventually, in the 1805 *Prelude*, an elaborate network of screen memories is constructed in order to delineate the "growth of a poet's mind"; at this point Wordsworth's relationship to his repressed material attains a kind of stability, which can be seen in the relatively minor revisions that are made to *The Prelude* during the succeeding three decades.

So Wordsworth's response is the typical one. Is this to say it is an "ordinary" one? Or to put it another way, can my analysis hope to engage the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry, the genius which one would assume (correctly) led me to want to write about Wordsworth in the first place? This study has been largely devoted to analyzing the evolution of Wordsworth's Real symptoms, of the way the expression of the poet's trauma changes as he moves through the Great Decade and along the chain of signifiers. This sort of reading, this mapping out of what we might call a genealogy of repression, is not particularly conducive to making value judgments about the quality of Wordsworth's verse. I believe anyone discussing these works in psychoanalytic terms is bound to run into similar difficulties. In Harold Bloom's reading it is in the very power of Wordsworth's repression—in the *completeness* of his forgetting of the antagonism with Milton—that the greatness of a work like *Tintern Abbey* may be found. Similarly, in the New Historicist reading, Wordsworth is a prime example of Romantic Ideology because of the success with which he represses history from his body of work; exploring this can allow us to appreciate his "grace under pressure" (McGann 2) in eliding the political concerns of the day.

By contrast, I do not see anything particularly remarkable in Wordsworth's originary repression of his Real encounter. I think his response to his traumatic moment on Salisbury Plain is basically the same one that would be made by any normal person under the circumstances. I would rather try to locate Wordsworth's greatness in the responses he makes when the Real returns in the veiled form of symptoms. I tend to focus on Wordsworth's avoidance of his Real (an avoidance any sane person would certainly share), but he is also the

poet-psychologist who discusses the growth of his own mind at such extraordinary length in *The Prelude*. Any discussion of repression in Wordsworth should never lose sight of the fact that this is the poet who wrote thousands of lines of autobiographical verse—not hundreds but thousands, as he remarked with a trace of embarrassment in a letter to Sir George Beaumont (1: 586)—and that a large proportion of this writing is devoted to analysis of his own mental processes. Indeed we might think of Wordsworth's career as a kind of therapy, a "writing cure" which moves steadily in the direction of personal revelation. Though he never works his way back to the primal scene of 1793, he is nevertheless able to learn a great deal about himself, and many of his own observations are consistent with the psychoanalytic theory that has always been in the background of my writing.

Consider the "severer interventions" (*Prelude* I. 370) of Nature in the formation of the adult personality:

> Ah me, that all
> The terrors, all the early miseries,
> Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
> The thoughts and feelings which have been infused
> Into my mind, should ever have made up
> The calm existence that is mine when I
> Am worthy of myself. (I. 355-61)

In this passage Wordsworth argues that traumatic moments help to create a strong and healthy mind. This is not so different from the Lacanian notion that the adult, Symbolic self is grounded on a traumatic Real substructure. The only real inconsistency with the theory as I have discussed it is Wordsworth's notion that such moments are to be found exclusively in childhood. Though the poet repressively distances trauma to childhood as a way of assuring himself that trauma is for him a thing of the past, he nevertheless is quite perceptive in recognizing that the traumatic elements of our existence are formative.

And then there is the following remarkable passage:

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct preeminence retain

A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
In trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired—
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount,
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had the deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will. (XI. 257-72)

Certain recollections come to our aid when we are "depressed / By false opinion and contentious thought." This is broadly consistent with what Freud and Lacan tell us are accomplished by screen memories. "Contentious thought" would certainly be a good description of the effect of repressed material threatening to come to the surface. It is at such moments—when trauma disrupts our equilibrium—that the spots of time are recalled, and the situation is defused. Again, though their ultimate source as a defense against the Salisbury Plain trauma remains veiled, the definition of spots of time in the 1805 *Prelude* is a very accurate description of the way memory can defend us from psychic threats.

If the Great Decade is looked at as a kind of therapy, one cannot help being struck by the growth of Wordsworth's insight. Trauma had at first been displaced onto characters such as the Sailor and Peter Bell; at some point (certainly by 1799) the poet is able to acknowledge it as his own, indeed to recognize that it made him the man he is. I believe it is the zeal with which Wordsworth interrogates his thoughts, the energy and intellect he brings to bear on the problem of how he came to be, that sets Wordsworth apart from other poets we might choose to psychoanalyze. It is appropriate, I think, to conclude by quoting the famous invocation from the Prospectus to *The Recluse*:

Urania, I shall need
Thy guidance, or a greater Muse, if such
Descend to earth or dwell in highest heaven!
For I must tread on shadowy ground, must sink
Deep—and, aloft ascending, breathe in worlds
To which the heaven of heavens is but a veil.
All strength—all terror, single or in bands,
That ever was put forth in personal form—
Jehovah—with his thunder, and the choir
Of shouting Angels, and the empyreal thrones—
I pass them unalarmed. Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—
My haunt, and the main region of my song. (25-41)

The epic poet asks the Muse for help when the job is too big. At a time when it was embarrassing—unheard of—to write thousands of lines of autobiographical poetry, the prayer to Urania perhaps struck readers as strange or even inappropriate. Now, we must acknowledge that Wordsworth's instinct was in this case unerring, that he was asking for precisely the right kind of help. To explore the mind is a monumental task, as any therapist could confirm. That Wordsworth made the mind his haunt is admirable; that his song is so insightful is remarkable.

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